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HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

**STATEMENT OF**  
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**HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**  
**BEFORE THE**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND**  
**RELATED AGENCIES**  
**OF THE**  
**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**  
**ON**  
**QUALITY OF LIFE**  
**13 MAY 2021**

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## U.S. Marine Corps Priorities

### **Introduction**

Chairwoman Wasserman Schultz, Ranking Member Carter, and distinguished members of the Committee thank you for giving me this opportunity to report to you on your Marines and their quality of life.

Individual readiness and family readiness are combat readiness. The Commandant, General Berger, and I are proud of our Marines and their families' for their enduring commitment to the physical, mental, and spiritual strength of our Corps. We are a warfighting organization, and by ensuring the high quality of life of our Marines, Sailors, and their families, we are ensuring the success of our mission and the ability of the Marine Corps to operate as the Nation's premier naval expeditionary force in readiness.

Your Marine Corps has decided to fund modernization and recover our readiness to continue to ensure our Marines are fully equipped for today's conflict. The publishing of the Commandant's Planning Guidance was the first step in this process. During FY20, the Marine Corps began to implement those initiatives, placing emphasis on force design and development, revitalizing efforts in professional military education, and focusing on core values –honor, courage, and commitment. Investments in these areas will improve the quality of life for the Marines and their families - the centerpiece of the Corps.

Our comprehensive portfolio of behavioral health and family programs services seeks the holistic fitness and readiness of our Marines and families - supporting body, mind, and spirit. Our approach is an integrated community-based service model that promotes the social, behavioral, and psychological fitness of Marines and families in order to enhance mission effectiveness. This coordinated approach focuses on prevention and on building skills and providing the resources needed to promote positive behaviors and reduce domestic and child abuse, suicide, substance misuse, and sexual assault and harassment. Currently, for the first time, the Human Performance Branch and Marine and Family Programs are working together to study and close gaps in resources and services. Efforts are framed across four lines of effort: skill building, communication, collaboration, and application of data and research.

Our programs include Community Counseling, Family Advocacy, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, Suicide Prevention, Substance Abuse, Combat Operational Stress, and integrated prevention efforts. We provide a broad array of prevention resources and services that include prevention plans, training and classes, non-medical counseling, victim services, and unit level prevention strategies. These are free and confidential non-medical counseling services by counselors at each installation, available to active duty service members and dependents.

## **Suicide Prevention**

Suicide prevention continues to be one of the Marine Corps top priorities. The Marine Corps cannot afford to lose any Marines to suicide. We continue to try to understand and address this problem at its core. Last year, we observed an increase in suicide counts, although rates will not be available until this fall. We know COVID-19 and some risk factors, such as social isolation, may contribute to risk in the Marine Corps and across the Department of Defense. Certainly these are challenging times, but we recognize how imperative it is to understand these risk factors associated with suicide and provide our Marines with the skills and resources to mitigate the unprecedented challenges brought on by COVID-19. The reality is that suicide prevention is a complex, challenging task; every individual is unique in how protective and risk factors affect them. We will continue to attack this from many angles.

I'd like to highlight our current and future suicide prevention initiatives. First, we are focused on training individual Marines to recognize the signs and symptoms of those at risk. These efforts include the: Unit Marine Awareness and Prevention Integrated Training, Combat and Operational Stress Control Capability initiatives, Suicide Prevention Program Officers, Chaplains, and Behavioral Health.

Additionally, we have revised the Inspector General Marine Corps checklist to ensure Commanders have the necessary protocols in place, at the unit level, to help prevent deaths by suicide. We are also developing Marine Awareness and Prevention Integrated Training for Families as a prevention-focused training designed to provide families with information on suicide prevention. Finally, we place an Operational Stress Control and Readiness (OSCAR) team within Marine Corps units who are there to help Marines recognize and respond to stress. Our OSCAR members are there to help and to connect Marines with other resources. Providing our Marines with the resources at the unit-level to help themselves and their battle buddy is a critical, early prevention measure.

## **Sexual Assault Prevention & Response**

Protecting Marines and preventing sexual harassment and assault are top priorities for the Corps. We are committed to preventing incidents of sexual harassment and assault by promoting positive behaviors, fostering healthy command climates, and building skills to identify and prevent negative behaviors. We remain committed to responding to these incidents, including those occurring before service, by providing victim-centered support.

Collaboration is key in addressing sexual assault prevention and response. The Marine Corps Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program works together with the other Services, Department of the Navy Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO), DoD SAPRO, and outside entities to enhance our ability to prevent and respond to sexual

assault, identify best practices, and to leverage resources. SAPR supports enterprise-wide efforts to prevent sexual assaults within the military and care for Marines.

There are a number of important updates to our sexual assault prevention efforts I'd like to highlight. Our renewed focus seeks to tailor training to specific levels of leadership that enables a multi-layered approach to prevention and equips Marines of every age, rank, and billet. For example, updated SAPR annual training for Staff Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCO) provides more focus at the small unit level. This training's goal is to help increase SNCO knowledge about sexual assault, reporting, resources, rank-specific roles and responsibilities, and to build skills consistent with primary prevention.

We also updated SAPR training for the Commander's Course to better prepare senior leadership to prevent sexual assault once they assume command. This includes information focused on actionable recommendations for pre-command leaders and small group discussions facilitated by Marine Corps mentors and SAPR experts. Commanders set the tone of their unit—we know how important it is to ensure they are equipped *before* they assume command to establish the right command climate—a climate that dissuades destructive behaviors, encourages Marines to look out for one another, and encourages reporting of crimes and mandates accountability for perpetrators and enablers—from day 1.

We acknowledge that we are not where we need to be; we still have incidents of sexual assault and harassment and so we must ensure we provide the most support to victims possible. A revised SAPR Victim Advocate training was released in October 2019 and has been fully implemented. The revised 40-hour curriculum focuses on building and refining advocacy skills and includes cultural competency and prevention training.

We want to leverage technological developments too. SAPR is implementing online evaluation tools for select SAPR annual training, VA training, and SARC initial training. The evaluation tools measure changes in knowledge, attitudes, and intentions, as well as training satisfaction, consistency of instruction, and quality of instruction. Beginning with pilots in FY21, these evaluation results will inform local SAPR personnel, as well as HQMC personnel, on the effectiveness of the trainings.

## **Spouse Employment**

Spouse employment can be a significant challenge for many Marine Corps families. The Marine Corps Family Member Employment Assistance Program (FMEAP) emphasizes a proactive approach for military spouses and other dependent family members. The Program enables them to formulate informed career and educational choices by using employment-related referral services, career and skill assessments, career coaching, job search guidance, portable career opportunities, and education center referrals/guidance. The FMEAP provides coaching

and training, such as interview techniques, resume and cover letter writing, the federal application process, salary negotiations, appropriate dress, staff-assisted computerized job searches, skills and personality assessments, one-on-one career coaching, education, training, and volunteer opportunities, as well as, entrepreneur business opportunities.

Installations provide training/workshops to assist spouses and transitioning service members with understanding the federal hiring process. Also, our Installations conduct job fairs to help veterans and family members in finding employment. FMEAP connects Marine Corps spouses with volunteer opportunities through installation Volunteer Coordinators to assist with establishing career experience throughout the permanent change of station transitions. FMEAP also helps translate volunteer experiences into marketable skills on resumes. The program's holistic approach helps support spouses throughout a Marine's service.

The FY18 National Defense Authorization Act provided reimbursement authority for state licensure and certification costs of a Marine spouse arising from relocation to another state; the maximum amount of reimbursement was increased from \$500 to \$1000 in the FY20 NDAA. To date, 248 individual claims have been successfully processed, totaling \$89,480 in reimbursements back to our Marines and spouses.

The Marine Corps participates in the DoD Military Spouse Preference (MSP) Program, which was instituted to reduce the adverse impact on the career paths of spouses of active-duty service members. Additionally, the Marine Corps participates in the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), which is a DoD-level partnership with more than 500 employers who commit to recruit, hire, promote, and retain military spouse employees.

To assist spouses with gaining transferable job skills, the Marine Corps participates in the Military Spouse Career Advancement Account (MyCAA) Scholarship. The Scholarship provides up to \$2,000 per year (maximum of \$4,000) for military spouses (Private to Sergeant, Warrant Officers 1 & 2, and 2nd Lieutenants to 1st Lieutenants) to pursue licenses, certificates, certifications or Associate Degrees necessary for gainful employment.

## **Child Care**

Our Child Youth Program provides high quality, accessible, and affordable programs and services for eligible families with children who are six-weeks to 18-years of age. High-quality child care is a family-readiness priority for the Marine Corps. Currently, the Marine Corps has a total immediate need of 1,434 spaces in Priorities 1 & 2 with notable waitlists at MCBs Camp Pendleton, Hawaii, Quantico, and Camp Lejeune/New River. These four installations maintain approximately 82 percent of the overall immediate waitlist. These are primarily due to a shortage of qualified workers, high turnover/low pay, and lengthy hiring process.

We are addressing child care waitlists as part of a DoD Compensation, Recruitment, and Retention Working Group. We have already implemented a non-competitive child care employee transfer program so we retain these valuable employees.

### **Exceptional Family Member Program**

For families with special needs members, the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) helps ensure Marines are assigned to duty stations where the required medical services and educational support are available for their family needs. EFMP allows Marines to focus on the mission, benefiting individual, family, and unit readiness. The Marine Corps maximizes family support funds to provide critical EFMP care services, which include: (1) Effective assignment of Marines and Exceptional Family Member (EFM) continuum of care, (2) Individualized family case management support, including Needs Assessments and Service Plans, (3) Care navigation training for EFM Advocates (parents/sponsor), and (4) Access to legal services. In FY 2020, there were 8,889 Marines enrolled in EFMP with 11,223 family members with a particular medical or educational need. Approximately 70 percent of enrollees are dependent children, and 30 percent are dependent adults.

We regularly seek ways to improve the EFMP and the Services we provide to our Marines and their families. Current initiatives include hiring a third attorney to support EFMP families in the Pacific and preparation to hire a fourth attorney to support families in the National Capital Region. We increased the number of EFMP staff who conduct assignment coordination, in order to increase our efficiency without sacrificing effectiveness. Significant enhancements to our Case Management System ensure standardized delivery of service to all families, supports mandatory reporting requirements and allows us to collect and analyze a variety of outcome metrics used to evaluate the effectiveness of our services. The results of the 2019-2020 program evaluation of EFMP, with needs assessment and customer survey, indicate that EFMP is the primary, most reliable and proficient source of special needs information for our customers. Families who use EFMP to address their needs are highly satisfied and EFMP policy and services directly align with customer-identified needs.

### **Conclusion**

Marines fight and win. Our Marines will have tough, realistic training with the resources to do it, with an eye always on the families who are the unsung strength of our Corps. Your Marines are the best in the world, and our Marines are our most valuable asset. By ensuring that we take care of all Marines and their families, we will continue to enhance the quality of our Corps, our overall combat effectiveness, and fulfill our responsibility to our Nation, who expect that their Marines are standing watch. Thank you for your unwavering support for the well-being of our Marines and their families. Semper Fidelis!

