

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY
THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

ON

MILITARY READINESS AND THE FY2023 BUDGET REQUEST

JULY 19, 2022

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Chairman Garamendi, Ranking Member Waltz, and distinguished members of this subcommittee, I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss Marine Corps readiness.

The Marine Corps remains the Nation's force-in-readiness—a naval expeditionary force ready to deter adversaries, respond to crisis and conflict, and contribute to Naval and Joint Force operations. Our identity as Marines centers on being ready to deter, fight, and win. As individuals, as units, and as a Corps, *everything we do is in support of warfighting advantage and being most ready when the Nation is least ready*. This is our obligation to the American people.

Readiness requires a combination of people, assets, and training—all of which leaders must resource and sequence to meet both current and future challenges. Additionally, our readiness efforts must consider the ever-changing character of war and the capability advancements of competitors and adversaries over time. Specifically, we must act now to sustain and strengthen our military advantages over China. In alignment with the 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS), we view China as our pacing challenge. This does not mean that we want to go to war with China. It means that we see China as the competitor against which we must measure our ability to deter, fight, and win. Additionally, Russia is currently demonstrating its willingness to inflict unprovoked violence on sovereign nations by invading Ukraine. We must consider our military readiness to deter Russian aggression in collaboration with our North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies and partners. We must also remain ready to respond to persistent threats from North Korea, Iran, and violent extremist organizations.

The Marine Corps is executing an extensive modernization campaign, *Force Design 2030* (FD2030), which will provide America with the Marine Forces required to support the Joint Force and the maritime fight. It will ensure Marines operating forward can respond to crisis, contribute to integrated deterrence, and conduct the day-to-day forward campaigning necessary to build advantage with our allies and partners. Our Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) budget will continue key FD2030 investments in procurement and research and development accounts for equipment modernization and new capabilities. We are also enhancing our talent management and training and education efforts to make, train, and retain the Marines that create our warfighting advantage. We are funding these improvements by reprioritizing investments within our existing topline budget and continuing to divest of capability and capacity not suited for the future operating environment.

While the focus of this modernization is to sustain a warfighting advantage against China, most of these changes are theater-agnostic and applicable against a range of competitors and adversaries around the globe. We are building a force capable of executing our emerging concepts, not a force exclusively tailored to them. In every possible future environment, Marines will be prepared for the harsh, violent realities that war brings. FD2030, with its training and manpower enhancements, will ensure we remain ready to fight in the most austere conditions imaginable. These changes will ensure the Marine Corps keeps its promise to be ready to fight in every clime and place.

Executing FD2030 while remaining ready to respond to emergent crises presents the Marine Corps with hard choices. We realize budgets are constrained by fiscal realities, but we have an obligation to identify and articulate our requirements. In my military judgment we will need to employ a mixed fleet of no less than 31 traditional Amphibious Warfare Ships and 18-35 Light Amphibious Warships to enable us to carry out the NDS and the Defense Planning Guidance (DPG).

We continue to develop, experiment with, and quickly implement concepts and capabilities that best prepare our Marines for the challenges ahead. We remain good stewards of taxpayer dollars, with a sharp focus on prioritizing investments that provide the Joint Force a warfighting advantage. Change is difficult—practically, culturally, and fiscally—but it must happen and happen now. Every day or dollar lost means young lance corporals and lieutenants shoulder more risk. Consider a reduction in operation and maintenance appropriations and its impact on our aviation readiness. At the squadron level our aviators will fly fewer hours; this in turn denies junior pilots and aircrew of the critical aircraft familiarization they need to operate safely, effectively, and efficiently. Subsequently, fewer pilots within the squadron are able to maintain proficiency and achieve the more advanced qualifications required of their platform. This raises the risk of mishaps, which have been shown to rise when aircrew train for fewer flight hours in a month. Aviation readiness will further deteriorate when our pilots and aircrew see their opportunities for advancement in their platform compromised, which will drive them from the service.

To achieve the readiness our Nation requires and that our Marines and their families deserve, we ask for your continued support for our modernization efforts and steady, predictable funding. Your support and oversight of our readiness efforts ensure the lethality of the Marine Corps and allow us to remain “First to Fight.”

Naval Expeditionary Forces

The character of war is ever-changing and our competitors and adversaries are making advances in areas where the U.S. has historically maintained dominance. Weapons wielded by tactical units now have ranges of hundreds of nautical miles, coupled with tremendous precision. The ability to communicate, once thought to be ubiquitous on the modern battlefield, is now challenged from our home stations to our objective areas. Even our air and naval superiority can be challenged by peers and near-peers using readily available technology. Additionally, China, Russia, and other actors are using maritime gray zone activities below the threshold of armed conflict that subvert international law, pressure our allies and partners, and jeopardize U.S. national interests. The Marine Corps recognizes these challenges and we are taking action to ensure we can provide ready and credible forces to deter foes, respond to crisis, fight, and win against a peer adversary.

Crisis Response

The Marine Corps continues to be the Nation's crisis response force of choice. Over the past year alone, our crisis response forces supported humanitarian assistance operations after an earthquake in Haiti, stood ready to evacuate embassies in Africa, and executed noncombatant evacuation operations in Afghanistan.

The Marine Corps' ability to project and sustain Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs) from amphibious warfare ships provides the Nation with a "floating Swiss Army knife," ready to launch forces from a mobile and forward-deployed piece of sovereign U.S. territory. The importance of the MEU's forward maritime presence cannot be overstated. The MEU provides combatant commanders with capable, credible, and forward-postured forces for crisis response, conventional deterrence, and campaigning from competition to conflict. When not responding to crises, MEUs help build critical relationships with allies and partners through security cooperation and interoperability exercises. Both before and after a fight begins, MEUs are a vital tool for our combatant commanders.

The 24th MEU's 2021 deployment provides an example of the global reach and utility of our crisis response forces. Deployed as part of the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group (ARG),

24th MEU primarily operated in the U.S. 5th Fleet and 6th Fleet areas of responsibility. While training with allies and partners in the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, Norway, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, 24th MEU exemplified our ability to operate in "every clime and place" and demonstrated the breadth of relationships the Marine Corps maintains abroad. Near the end of its deployment, 24th MEU supported the U.S. withdrawal from the 20-year war in Afghanistan. In August 2021, the MEU deployed to Hamid Karzai International Airport for non-combatant evacuation operations support during Operation Freedom's Sentinel. During that time, they provided airfield operations support and assisted in processing nearly 130,000 evacuees out of Afghanistan. Throughout its deployment, 24th MEU provided numbered fleet and combatant commanders around the world with a responsive, flexible, and forward-deployed force capable of maritime power projection, contingency operations, and crisis response.

Several key investments within our FY23 budget will enhance the readiness of our crisis response forces. First, this budget continues procurement of the Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV), which provides significant improvements over the legacy Assault Amphibious Vehicle (AAV) in mobility, lethality, protection, and safety. ACVs enable crisis response forces to maneuver from amphibious warfare ships and go ashore without a port facility. ACVs, combined with amphibious warfare ships and organic aircraft, provide the forcible entry capability required when the Marine Corps must seize or defend advanced naval bases. In January 2022, Marines in ACVs conducted waterborne operations alongside AAVs from the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force during Exercise Iron Fist at Camp Pendleton, California. This fall, a platoon of ACVs will conduct its first operational deployment as part of a MEU. We also continue to modernize our tactical vehicle fleet with the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV). The JLTV has proven a capable and versatile platform, not only for its primary mission, but also to enable fires, command and control, and air defense. These and other FY23 investments, including the aviation programs discussed later in this statement, are vital to the Marine Corps remaining a globally employable and ready crisis response force.

Stand-in Forces

Another significant Marine Corps contribution to the Naval and Joint fight is stand-in forces. Stand-in forces are units that are task-organized, trained, and equipped to disrupt an adversary's plans at every point on the competition continuum. These forces will operate inside an

adversary's weapons engagement zone, strategically placed in areas where they can expose malign behavior, collect targeting data, close maritime chokepoints with precision long-range fires, or herd adversaries into areas where our Naval and Joint forces can bring even more weapons to bear. Adversaries will not be able to simply ignore stand-in forces and accomplish their military goals. Stand-in forces impose costs on competitors and adversaries by causing them to expend some of their limited assets to attempt to locate them. This reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance capability further enables Naval and Joint force maneuver. Stand-in forces are survivable, in that they can independently persist for short periods and can reposition using organic mobility to avoid targeting. Their physical and electromagnetic signatures are not easily detected, and they possess the lethality to fight in cases when detected. Stand-in forces place as little sustainment burden as possible on a logistics system already in need of improvement. They require less support in austere environments than previous formations because they can produce some of their own water and power; use local food and fuel sources; and be resupplied by air, surface, and subsurface means. Finally, stand-in forces will operate forward in partnership with other nations to support an integrated approach to competition. This includes conducting security cooperation, security force assistance, and exercises to strengthen relationships and develop maritime domain awareness. These capabilities enable stand-in forces to provide both the credible deterrent and credible combat power that will best support the NDS and the DPG in both competition and conflict.

Our FY23 budget supports stand-in forces by investing in our top priority programs, including ground-based anti-ship missile capability, sensors, and communication networks. The Marine Corps' anti-ship missile capability, Navy-Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System (NMESIS), will provide stand-in forces a precise, lethal, and survivable ground-based anti-ship missile capability. In August 2021, we completed a successful live-fire demonstration by firing two Naval Strike Missiles and striking a moving ship target. We plan to field our first NMESIS battery in 2023. Uncrewed systems, including the MQ-9A Extended Range uncrewed aerial system (UAS), will provide our naval forces with the sensing capabilities necessary to detect targets and pass targeting data to the Joint kill web. These advanced systems will increase a stand-in force's situational awareness and extend its area of influence. The Marine Corps is also investing in resilient communication networks to transmit and receive information from the Joint Force at the satellite, aerial, and terrestrial levels. This ability will ensure the Marine Corps can provide

necessary sensor and reconnaissance capabilities to the Joint Force while simultaneously being supported by the Joint Force when we conduct our own strikes.

In March 2022, we redesignated Third Marine Regiment in Hawaii as the Third Marine Littoral Regiment (3d MLR). The MLR is a new formation specifically task-organized and equipped to operate as a part of a stand-in force. With an Initial Operating Capability in FY23, 3d MLR will validate our stand-in forces concept and refine the structure of additional MLRs in the future. Adjustments to the MLR will be made if and when needed. We are confident that 3d MLR will enhance our ability to deter our peer competitors, reassure our allies and partners, and contribute a unique capability to the maritime fight.

Organic Naval Mobility

One of the most valuable characteristics of our naval expeditionary forces is their ability to use organic Naval mobility. The ability to position and reposition throughout a battlespace without relying on strategic lift, host nation permission, or deep water ports is critical to our survivability, resiliency, and lethality. Amphibious ships and the agility they provide the Joint Force are a national strategic capability. No other platform has more flexibility. To ensure our readiness in the future, we must ensure Marine crisis response and stand-in forces have the organic Naval mobility platforms they require. In my military judgment, this is a Marine Corps supported by no fewer than 31 amphibious warfare ships and 18 to 35 LAWs to execute the missions the Nation requires of us.

Amphibious warfare ships and LAWs are complementary, but not interchangeable. Amphibious warfare ships enable MEUs to conduct global crisis response, project and sustain forces in a contested environment, and aggregate combat power for forcible entry. To be clear, forcible entry does not mean thousands of Marines attacking shoulder to shoulder across a beach. It means thousands of Marines across an area of responsibility, working in concert with the assets brought by amphibious warfare ships, to ensure U.S. forces can operate where and when needed, even if an adversary attempts to prevent us from doing so. LAWs are envisioned to support operational and tactical maneuver for stand-in forces. The LAW will have the ability to land anywhere without the need of a port will complicate an adversary's decision calculus. These ships will also support sustainment in a contested environment. In my best military judgment, the only way to deter or respond is to be present. Amphibious warfare ships, combined with LAWs, make that possible.

Although amphibious ships are funded through the Navy's budget, these ships directly impact the readiness of the Marine Corps and its ability to accomplish its statutory missions. The Navy's FY23 budget incrementally funds LHA-9 and funds LPD-32, the last ship of its class and the end of the LPD-17 Flight II production line. This budget request also plans to fund the first LAW in FY25. Support for amphibious investments in FY23 and future years is crucial to our ability to provide the naval expeditionary force our Nation requires. It is also vital to our ability to effectively train for our missions. Without ships with which to train, our readiness decreases. We cannot build trust and interoperability with our allies and partners from a distance, nor can we contest malign activities without being present. Without the necessary number of amphibious ships, we may find that China is the first to arrive at a disaster or crisis. This cannot happen.

Aviation

Marine aviation provides the vital organic mobility, lethality, protection, sustainment, and connectivity critical to Marine Corps combat readiness and Naval expeditionary warfare. Readiness rates for Marine aviation continue to rise. The average mission capable rate in FY21 reached 65 percent—an increase from 62.5 percent in FY20 and 55 percent in FY17. This equates to 90 more flyable aircraft across the Marine Corps on any given day compared to five years ago. Notably, our deployed squadrons and MEUs are averaging a mission capable rate of more than 80 percent. Maintenance planning and process improvements at the organizational level have reduced Non-Mission Capable due to Maintenance rates from an average of nearly 23 percent in FY17 to less than 16 percent in FY21. Enterprise-level initiatives at the intermediate and depot-level promise to increase aircraft on the flightline and reduce the turn-around time for high-level maintenance and modernization evolutions. We owe these readiness gains to targeted funding for key readiness enabler accounts, success of various platform-specific readiness initiatives, and the day-in and day-out hard work of our Marine maintainers.

Several aviation accomplishments over the past year demonstrate our readiness for current and future missions and deserve specific attention. As the first-ever deployment of the F-35B on a foreign vessel, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 211 conducted operations aboard four different ships from the U.S., United Kingdom, Japan, and Italy. This not only highlighted our flexibility, lethality, and survivability from sea-based expeditionary basing, but also proved the feasibility of operational maneuver for the airframe from allied ships. While the Marine Corps' Cost-Per-Tail-

Per-Year metric for F-35s is close to the target set in the FY21 National Defense Authorization Act, we will continue to push manufacturers to reduce cost and increase efficiency.

The Marine Corps' newest heavy-lift helicopter, the CH-53K, continues to demonstrate impressive performance in terms of distance, airspeed, and gross weight lift capacity that no other rotary platform can match. This aircraft will provide the heavy organic lift and operational reach necessary to support distributed maritime operations across vast distances in the Pacific and elsewhere. The CH-53K achieved initial operating capability in April 2022, and our first CH-53K squadron will deploy in 2024. Meanwhile, the CH-53K demonstrated its unique capabilities during its first successful mission in September 2021, recovering a downed Army MH-60 at an altitude of 12,000 feet mean sea level in the mountains of California.

Our KC-130J and MV-22 squadrons continue to be the workhorses of our aviation fleet. Combatant commander demand for what these platforms bring to the fight remains high; our Marines continue to fly and fix these aircraft at an impressive rate to support that demand. KC-130J capacity is increasing as we start to realize the benefits of increased depot capacity and approach completion of our program of record. We are addressing MV-22 readiness rates through dedicated work on reducing maintenance requirements, such as the Nacelle Improvement Program, and through incorporation of maintenance initiatives like Organizational-Level Maintenance Management as a part of Naval Sustainment System-Aviation. Continued stable and predictable funding in support of Marine Aviation flight hour, sustainment, and aviation spares accounts will be critical to our ability to continue this level of performance and readiness.

The Marine Corps is also re-organizing or activating new aviation squadrons in the Pacific that will support a defense-in-depth against our strategic competitors. In FY23, we will re-organize one of our uncrewed aviation squadrons to be equipped with the MQ-9A Extended Range UAS. These systems will support the overall aerial communication network to sense and observe our adversaries' actions. We also plan to activate an additional active duty KC-130J squadron. These aircraft will provide aerial refueling and transportation capabilities in the vast Pacific region.

Logistics and Infrastructure

Contested Logistics

As mentioned when describing stand-in forces, our logistics enterprise is not currently designed to support our Naval expeditionary forces in an increasingly complex and contested

maritime environment. We see logistics as our pacing warfighting function; our ability to position and sustain our combat power will set the limits on what is operationally possible. In the most demanding operating environments, every action—regardless of the domain—may be monitored, tested, or disrupted by a competitor or adversary. To succeed, we will have to be lighter, more mobile, and more expeditionary than ever before. Therefore, we must focus on the capabilities, relationships, formations, and equipment that will enable us to meet these logistical challenges at every level. If we fail to do this, we will have the very best capabilities that we cannot sustain.

To meet the logistics challenges of our operating environment, the Marine Corps is working to increase our global logistics awareness, diversify our distribution methods, and improve our sustainment ability. We are currently seeking and researching equipment with potential hybrid/electric propulsion systems, renewable energy sources, and greater fuel efficiency. These initiatives will give flexibility to the warfighter by allowing them to either produce their own support or reduce the need for support from outside units. To be clear, we are interested in these systems to increase warfighting capability. Every gallon of fuel not needed is almost seven pounds of ordnance that we can move instead. Data-driven maintenance initiatives like Conditions Based Maintenance Plus will enable leaders to make maintenance decisions based on evidence, rather than overly prescriptive and potentially wasteful preset milestones. In an effort to push repair parts availability as far forward as possible, we continue to increase our additive manufacturing capability. We currently maintain more than 300 3D printers across the Fleet and our maintenance depots, including metal printers at the depots, and we plan to field metal printing capability to our maintenance battalions by FY25. We are working to prestage 3D printing equipment forward and we are building the ability to securely leverage local host and allied nation equipment to make us more ready to fight and sustain our forward forces.

We are also developing a family of uncrewed logistics systems tailored to littoral environments, which will increase our resupply flexibility and reduce risk to Marine forces. These efforts, along with others, will provide the reliable and flexible logistics support our Marines will need in the most challenging conditions.

Continued work and investment are required to ensure a logistics system that is resilient against peer or near-peer competitors. The Joint Logistics Enterprise underpins all of our logistics initiatives, enabling a global, dynamic, and modernized supply chain. Continued investment in logistics information technology (Log IT) systems enabled with artificial intelligence/machine

learning capabilities will help ensure a low-signature logistics ecosystem that protects the identity and location of stand-in forces. This work will create the sensor-based, data-driven, and networked environment necessary for the sustainment of stand-in forces and crisis response forces in contested environments.

Infrastructure

Marine Corps installations are more than buildings, ranges, and airfields; they are warfighting platforms that provide vital support for every one of our missions, our Marines, Sailors, and their families. We must resource them as such and ensure they remain ready to support not only today's requirements but also future challenges.

Specifically, more than half of our FY23 military construction budget is focused on our Pacific installations. On any given day, there are more than 80,000 Marines deployed to, stationed in, or focused on the Pacific—our priority theater. More than 23,000 of these Marines are currently forward-postured west of the International Date Line and positioned inside China's weapons engagement zone. If we do not fund modern and resilient infrastructure in the Pacific, we will not be postured to stand-in or respond to crisis. Pacific infrastructure projects such as infantry battalion facilities and 9th Engineer Support Battalion's operations facility will support the relocation of Marines from Okinawa to Guam. Additionally, FY23 barracks projects at Kadena Air Force Base will support the quality of life that Marines deployed to Okinawa need and deserve.

In terms of communications infrastructure, we are prototyping a 5G network testbed at the Marine Corps Logistics Command Albany that will serve as a platform for ongoing experimentation and validation of emerging 5G capabilities. The 5G Smart Warehouse project will enable Marine Force Storage Command to validate the potential performance and process improvements made possible by a 5G network. This is a major milestone towards improving logistics support and force readiness in every theater.

Another infrastructure priority in the FY23 budget is installation resiliency. Conflict does not wait for extreme weather events to pass or for utility outages to resolve. Our installations must be ready to support our Marines at all times, and we are taking deliberate actions to ensure our bases and stations are as resilient as possible. A prime example of these efforts is the 2021 completion of the Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Miramar microgrid project. The microgrid is composed of a combination of a natural gas and diesel engine-driven power plant, landfill energy,

photovoltaic energy, and battery storage. In the event of an energy blackout, the microgrid can power mission essential functions at MCAS Miramar for up to 14 days. The microgrid ensures continuity of operations for our local commanders and provides a resource to local governments in the event of an emergency. We have also installed microgrids at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma and Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island. Additionally, Marine Corps Logistics Base Albany became the first Marine Corps Net Zero installation in February 2022. Net Zero means the installation produces as much electricity from renewable energy sources as it consumes from utility providers. This allows us to spend more resources on lethality.

To further improve our installation resiliency, we are developing installation master plans that address the impacts of climate change, sea-level rise, and major weather events on our bases and stations. The Marine Corps has also developed two new decision support tools to help optimize our facility investment decisions. These tools focus our efforts on our most critical and significant assets and will help maintain our installations at a higher state of readiness. It is also important to note that over the past several years, restoration and modernization (RM) funding has not kept pace with a growing list of RM requirements. The Marine Corps continues to focus its limited RM funds on critical projects that support infrastructure resiliency, operational readiness, and new capabilities.

Finally, another infrastructure priority is the modernization of the Marine Corps Organic Industrial Base (MCOIB). In 2019, we submitted the MCOIB Facilities Plan and the United States Senate Report on the Readiness of the MCOIB. This 25-year plan provides the strategy to recapitalize or consolidate existing facilities, construct new facilities, and improve workflow processes and productivity at our two depot production plants and long-term equipment storage sites in Albany, Georgia, and Barstow, California; as well as Marine Corps Support Facility at Blount Island Command, Florida. To date, the Marine Corps has completed five projects, two more are under construction, and another planned to start construction in summer 2022.

Information Environment Modernization

Information technology is a critical enabler for the command and control of Marine forces, management and protection of information assets, and collaboration with mission partners. Network modernization is the foundation from which we sense, make sense, and act. We are modernizing our end user devices, improving our enterprise and tactical communication transport

infrastructure; migrating to cloud computing; and investing in artificial intelligence and machine learning. Additionally, the Marine Corps has invested extensively in Zero Trust efforts to combat against cyber exploits attempting to infiltrate our networks. Without the ability to secure, operate, and defend our networks in a degraded or denied communication environment, we will not capitalize on the potential capabilities of the Joint All Domain Command and Control framework. Our investments will provide seamless, agile, resilient, transparent, and secure infrastructure to support Joint Force information advantage.

Developing and Taking Care of our Marines

Talent Management

The changes the Marine Corps is making to its capabilities and concepts will only succeed if we have parallel advancements and investments in our people. We are executing *Talent Management 2030* (TM2030), our strategic plan for modernizing the way we recruit, develop, and retain Marines. TM2030 describes a fundamental redesign of our personnel system, empowered by new statutory authorities provided by Congress. It details how the Marine Corps will implement new models for recruiting and retaining talent, modernize our assignments process consistent with our warfighting philosophy, introduce new measures to increase career flexibility, and optimize access to modern digital tools, processes, and analytics, consistent with industry standards. Our end state is to improve combat lethality and capability by better identifying and cultivating an individual Marine's talents through education, training, mentorship, and experience, and assigning them to positions where they can best contribute to the success of their unit and the Corps. Through these efforts and engaged leadership, the Marine Corps will be able to capitalize on the totality of America's talent.

The Marine Corps is already executing several initiatives to modernize and improve personnel management. To increase family stability while sustaining warfighting capability, we are increasing Permanent Change of Station (PCS) flexibility and efficiencies, such as reassigning Marines locally when a career-enhancing billet is available or using distributed learning rather than PCS for education. We have extended our secondary caregiver parental leave from 14 days to 21 days, and are working with the Department of Defense on further changes to our parental leave policies using new authorities granted in the FY22 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). We are in the process of implementing our 360-degree Leadership Review Program to improve

leadership effectiveness by identifying blind spots and areas of improvement for personal growth. We will also begin implementing opt-out flexibility for promotion boards this year. We are studying further changes, such as a lateral entry program and a career staff track. The lateral entry system will not mean individuals will avoid entry-level training. It simply means placing those key individuals at the appropriate rank once they have earned the title “Marine.”

Our FY23 budget also includes vital investments in manpower information technology (IT) systems modernization—the backbone for virtually everything we accomplish in talent management. Our goal is to consolidate the more than 70 disparate manpower applications and systems into a small number of applications on a single IT system, bringing our human resource practices in line with best practices in the private sector. These actions, along with other policy changes and investments, will help us more fully harness the breadth and depth of talent within our force and the American people.

Preserving Medical Readiness

In accordance with Department of Defense policy, we continue to enforce the COVID-19 vaccine mandate to ensure the Marine Corps remains healthy and ready to deploy at a moment’s notice. The order to receive this vaccine and many other vaccines is critical to ensuring the readiness and health of our force. As of the submission of this statement, 97 percent of the total force is fully or partially vaccinated, and we have separated 3,121 Marines (1,869 Active Component and 1,252 Reserve Component) for refusing to follow a lawfully given order regarding medical readiness. We also continue to process religious accommodations requests, giving each case individual consideration with respect to the unique facts and circumstances presented, the compelling government interest, and whether there are any lesser restrictive means to accommodate a request.

Training and Education

In concert with our talent management modernization efforts, we will also transform our training and education enterprise to produce the most skilled and ready Marines to meet the demands of the future operating environment. To achieve this end state, we will focus on shaping Marines into more cognitively enabled, capable, and resilient leaders without diminishing their individual grit. We are updating our training scenarios, methodologies, and training systems;

evaluating commanders and leaders at all levels; and improving the quality and rigor of professional military education courses. We are also modernizing our training ranges with improved instrumentation, feedback, and safety tools. Additionally, we are developing a Live, Virtual, and Constructive Training Environment across the entire training enterprise. We look forward to sharing more about our training and education modernization efforts in our *Training and Education 2030* document, which we will publish later this year.

Safety

Over the past several years, we have lost the lives of too many Marines in preventable training incidents. Losses of life in training are not the “cost of doing business.” It is a price no Marine or Sailor should have to pay.

Safety is an integral part of Marine Corps warfighting advantage and readiness. Over the past several years, we have made significant progress in improving our safety performance and culture; however, there is still much work to do. We are applying deliberate focus to our Government Accountability Office Report on Military Vehicle Accidents corrective action plan; we expect to complete all tasks in the report in 2023. We are diligently implementing the recommendations generated by investigations into the July 2020 AAV mishap, as well as the forthcoming Strategic Review of Amphibious Operations. Additionally, last year, we introduced the Marine Corps Mishap Library—a central repository for mishap information and lessons learned that enables leaders at all levels to learn from past mistakes. From senior leader participation in the Defense Safety Oversight Council and the recent congressionally mandated Joint Safety Council to creating sound safety cultures in our small units, we are committed to providing the leadership and resources to improve our safety performance and readiness. As an additional step towards improving the safety culture within the Marine Corps, we recently conducted a Safety Stand Down. Over the course of two weeks 90% of our aviation units reviewed best practices and focused on areas where we can improve to ensure our units remain capable, ready, and safe. Our remaining aviation units, some of those deployed or with upcoming drill periods, will complete the Safety Stand Down in the coming weeks to achieve full compliance across the force. The results and feedback of this Safety Stand Down will enable us to maintain a proactive vice reactive stance towards safety, not only for our aviation units, but across the entire force. We cannot eliminate the risks of our profession, but we will do all we can to mitigate those risks and elevate them to senior leaders before high-risk events take place.

Conclusion

The United States is a maritime nation, and as such, it requires a Marine Corps ready to deter, fight, and win in the maritime domain. As America's premier global crisis response force, your Marine Corps is ready to accomplish these missions today, and with your continued support, will be even more ready tomorrow. On behalf of all of our Marines, Sailors, civilians, and families, we thank you for your support for our efforts to remain the most ready when the Nation is least ready.