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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF
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HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
SENIOR ENLISTED LEADER PERSPECTIVE
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Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I am honored to speak to you today on behalf of your United States Marines. You have never given up

on the care and attention to our Marines and our families, caregivers, and survivors, and I'm grateful. Thank you for your time and allowing me to provide you with an update on the state of your Marine Corps.

Bottom line up front: Your Marines are ready to fight. Through all the challenges we've faced, we've remained ready. We will always remain ready to fight and win, and we'll never give that up.

The Marine Corps has managed to shift our focus from fighting an adversary with limited capabilities to a peer threat with sophisticated and deceptive capabilities who, today, threaten our American way of life, the sovereignty of many nations, and the global prosperity of all people.

The technological enhancements and the paradigm of how we fight has evolved to better prepare us for an uncertain future but a certain foe. Those who may choose to agitate us, our friends, or the global rule of law, need to understand what this Congress already knows: your military – your Marines - are stronger, faster, smarter, and trusted.

We will continue to sharpen our edges and prepare for every domain and for every battlefield. With the support of this Committee, your Marines will do all that is necessary to ensure our Nation is protected and the battles we fight end in victory.

Down to our core, this is who your Marines are and what we want to do. This is why your Marines chose this organization, founded on the call to serve, and fight until victory is won. Year after year, generation after generation, the Marine Corps has remained the Few and the Proud. Our brand hasn't changed, nor has our fight and win spirit. The Marine Corps' lore and legacy are woven into our training, giving our young leaders a beacon to follow and a reputation to uphold. We will never let this nation down as long as we have those who continue to choose a place among the few and are willing to fight. Today, we do.

As a society, we must reverse the trend of inflated negative language about those who serve the Nation they swear to protect. It creates a distrust from the American people, and that trust is fundamental to the success of the all-volunteer force.

RECRUITING

Your Marine Corps successfully met our recruiting goal last year. I am not surprised by this success. In the face of a lower propensity to serve, a smaller recruiting pool, and other challenges, the Marine Corps Recruiting Command demonstrated tremendous determination to accomplish the mission. The Corps' brand prevailed, and this is a characteristic of who joins our ranks. Our Marines want to serve and fight on behalf of our Nation.

As society continues to form the post-pandemic normal, our Recruiting Command has a renewed focus on systematic, relevant, dynamic, and anticipatory training. Training = Confidence = Victory. The service remains committed to the most suitable total force resourcing of Marines, systems, and operating funds to win. We are using new technologies and data sets to anticipate, validate, prioritize, and adjust the force laydown across the country.

It has been 50 years since the inception of the all-volunteer force. During this time the military came to be viewed as a desirable pathway to greater opportunities for our service members and their families – both in and out of uniform. We're now reminded that the Nation's youth, and their perceptions of the military, evolve. We must always ensure the health and success of our all-volunteer force and the strategic advantage it provides – talent, capability, and warfighting prowess. I respectfully request your continued support, as well as the support and engagement from states, territories, in advocating for service in the Marine Corps. It is time for a national dialog on the value of military service.

The Commandant and I remain committed to providing the best resources and the highest caliber Marine recruiters to achieve our accession mission while sustaining quality, which is the bedrock of successful recruiting. But let me be clear, your Marines are and will be leaders and warfighters. That doesn't change.

RETENTION

We exceeded our retention goals last fiscal year and already on track to meet this year's goal. We continue to see improvement in both first term and subsequent term retention, attaining 101 percent and 107 percent of our goals, respectively, last year. We've reached our First Term Alignment Plan mission for this fiscal year of 6,225 Marines. Last year we met that goal in July.

With the foundation that we will improve housing for single Marines and families, and improve overall quality of life, we will continue to incentivize Marines at every crossroad. Three efforts are noteworthy in this regard. First, we will continue to expand non-monetary incentives – like the duty station incentive – to not only take care of Marines and their families, but also to ensure that Marines are in the right place to best support the service. Second, we will build on the success of efforts like the Early Reenlistment Authority, which provides the opportunity for Marines to reenlist earlier than they traditionally would have. Third, we continue to leverage the Commandant's Retention Program, and the ability to jump to the front of the line for our most motivated to reenlist

The Commandant's mission to mature the force is well underway. At the beginning of this past retention season, we identified the top ten percent of Marines by primary military occupational specialty (MOS) for preapproval of reenlistment. Maturing the force requires a resolute investment in the top-performing Marines and a reduction in any barriers to initiating and submitting reenlistment requests. This allowed our most dedicated to move forward in their careers and reenlist. Based on this success, Manpower and Reserve Affairs is developing a plan to double the number of top-performing Marines selected for Commandant's Retention Program during next year's retention campaign.

With Congress' support, we will improve our retention MOS match, which also enhances our warfighting capability and professionalism. Despite these successes, we're encountering a tougher retention environment. We continue to have challenges in certain communities, like aviation, cyber, and some of our intelligence specialties. These are the same Marines we need to keep due to the high up-front investment and the niche capabilities they provide. As our senior leaders in the Marine Corps continue to make strides in fostering career longevity, we benefit from the continued support from Congress for the flexible incentives and special pays you have

provided. The current and future environment requires warfighters with the skillsets that'll enable the Marine Corps to fight and win against peer-competitors. This, in the face of a competing civilian industry, is a challenge we face, but we face together in support of our national defense.

PAY AND INCENTIVES

We continue to use both monetary and non-monetary incentives to retain, match, and assign Marines to billets that are appropriate for their grade and skill and necessary in support of the Marine Corps' mission. Incentive pays remain critical to this effort. Special incentive pay allow us to shape our career force by targeting critical MOSs and supporting lateral movement of Marines to these billets.

Thank you for authorizing the incentives and special pays we use to target hard to fill MOSs, skills, and assignments, including those aimed at retaining those Marines with high demand skills.

Last year I requested a review of the enlisted pay scale and we're thankful for this year's 4.6 percent pay raise. I have worked within the Department of Defense to ensure the upcoming President's Budget will provide military pay, housing, and subsistence allowance increases.

The prospect of equitable income is a foundation of the all-volunteer force impacts to both recruiting and retention. We look forward to the quadrennial review of military compensation and its findings.

Congress' passage of the new Basic Needs Allowance (BNA) will help supplement those service members whose household income and family size places them under 150 percent of Federal poverty guidelines. After announcing the BNA benefit to the force in January 2023, we have identified, notified, and are assisting, those members who are potentially eligible. I'm personally requesting your continued commitment to collaborating with us to address economic security issues that impact the well-being of our Marines and their families.

We are remaining agile with the Blended Retirement System (BRS) implementation. We have taken action to increase the BRS continuation pay multipliers to support our broader retention objectives. In January 2023, the Marine Corps increased the continuation pay multiplier from 2.5 times to 5.0 times monthly basic pay for active and full-time reserve Marines, and from 0.5 times to 1.0 times for part-time reservists. Continuation pay is offered to Marines in between 8 to 12 years of service and the multiplier increase signals to them that their continued service is valued. Marines can receive as much as 13 times their monthly basic pay. We are currently assessing the value of increasing BRS continuation pay and moving it earlier in a Marine's career.

HEALTHCARE

The Defense Health Agency has undertaken the largest transformation in the history of military health systems.

Adequate healthcare for our Marines is the minimum standard and vital to the all-volunteer force. To care for our families and those who support our service adjacent to our ranks is how we'd like to exceed that minimum. We're after career longevity and healthy homes, and that comes with proper and present healthcare for our people.

Furthermore, we're ensuring an integrated and comprehensive prevention system that enhances the perseverance of every Marine by aligning health crisis prevention resources. This is a focus on our people. With the continued support from this Committee and the resources requested, we will better prepare our force to persevere in the face of adversity and win in all battles – both in combat and personal.

Suicide and harmful behaviors remain Corps-wide concerns that have lasting negative effects on Marines, their loved ones, the Marine Corps, and our communities. Access to mental health providers and resources remains paramount and something with which we remain very concerned. Continuing to ensure adequate mental health care access is not just limited to the Marine Corps or Department of Defense—it is a nation-wide concern. Since 2011, the Marine

Corps' suicide rate is generally comparable to the U.S. population – and this remains way too high.

Marines and their families aren't exempt from the same tensions as the society around them. Failed relationships, family hardships, deaths, post-traumatic stress, financial hardship, and mental health conditions are some of the common stressors Marines face with during their time in service. Sometimes, the toughest part of those challenges is being able to know or understand that something isn't right.

We're after healthy homes and careers with support not just for crises, but for routine fitness.

We train our Marines to find the signs associated with depression and harmful behaviors and to preserve the life and well-being of our sisters and brothers. I'd like to thank this Committee for your continued support in our prevention programs, which include Integrated and Comprehensive Prevention, Combat and Operational Stress Control Capability initiatives, Suicide Prevention Program Officers, the Marine Intercept Program, and the vital role our Chaplains and behavioral health specialists play in human performance.

Our primary prevention workforce includes 64 Embedded Preventive Behavioral Health Capability (EPBHC) personnel and 19 Health Promotions personnel. The Marine Corps is increasing the prevention workforce with 26 new EPBHC Primary Prevention Integrators. Which will increase the collaborative prevention efforts at commands and installations that previously did not have EPBHC.

The Marine Corps' prevention workforce completes required comprehensive training provided by the Department of Defense.

For those Marines who are dealing with stressors or trauma and worsening well-being, secondary prevention efforts focus on teaching stressor-specific strategies, shoring up protective factors, and mitigating risk factors at the earliest signs of distress to increase effectiveness and reduce escalation.

The Marine Corps uses Community Counselors, Chaplains, and Marine and Family Life Counselors, as well as trusted leaders and peers to help protect Marines and their families against further harm. When applicable to the situation, Family Advocacy Counselors and Advocates, Substance Abuse Counselors, and Sexual Assault Response Coordinators and Advocates are available to provide situation specific support.

Prevention in Action Stakeholder Training, released in 2022 from Headquarters Marine Corps, ensures all prevention stakeholders have a shared understanding of integrated and comprehensive prevention. The training compliments the DoD Prevention Workforce training.

As the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, I am proud to see that our leaders are sharing their stories, opening more doors to mental perseverance, and closing the doors on the stigmas associated with help-seeking behaviors. I am thankful for these stories of perseverance from Marines who continue to lead, who continue to fight and win, and who continue to exemplify “Semper Fidelis. Seeking help to cope and persevere during challenges is the first step toward a healthier life.

SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION AND SEXUAL HARRASMENT

The life blood of our unit cohesion and esprit de corps is respect for one another. Our Marine Corps’ strategic advantage against any adversary is our people. When we’re closely knit as a team, we prevail. When harmful and destructive behaviors are present amongst our ranks, we deteriorate. “Know your Marines and look out for their welfare” is one of the 11 Marine Corps Leadership Principles. These principles are a bedrock to the way we train, operate, and live daily. Marines serve with honor, courage, and commitment, and we will continue to do so with respect for human life.

All Marines, from our most senior leaders to our newest entry-level graduates, know and understand the importance of a healthy workplace and healthy practices away from duty. We will never move our focus from the prevention of sexual harassment and sexual assault. The Marine

Corps remains committed to taking every report seriously while promoting trust in the chain of command.

Presently, “prior-to-service” reports are 16 percent of the Marine Corps’ annual total. We are proud of all who step forward after they enter the Corps and seek the support to make them a healthier person and a stronger warfighter. The Marine Corps will continue to foster a culture of accountability and trust, and we will provide the support and care for those who enter with this experience. This truly describes the character of your Marines – integrity, courage and justice.

We have been directed to establish a robust permanent sexual assault prevention architecture across the force. Every Marine leader supports the creation of this new force of professionals, yet I believe we are being directed to create an architecture that is out of proportion to the other services based on inflated statistics that created misperceptions. The problem indeed persists, and regardless of the methodology, solving this egregious and important issue will require approaches founded in fact.

The Marine Corps’ Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program uses a holistic approach to prevention and response, and it focuses on the total fitness and wellness of Marines and family members - mental, physical, spiritual, and social.

The Marine Corps begins this approach in entry level training, introducing the concept of the Continuum of Harm. This prevention method focuses on healthy communication, boundaries, and relationships to augment consent discussions. By including updated scenarios, the training emphasizes that sexual harassment, sexual assault, and other harmful behaviors do not align with the Marine Corps core values and will not be tolerated. Active partnership with Training and Education Command continues to develop entry-level and skills common to all Marines, leadership skills, to include PME, and annual training requirements.

Furthermore, the revision to the First Sergeants’ Course and Commandant’s Combined Commandership Course PMEs expand the conversation to address the impact of trauma, counterintuitive behaviors, and trauma-informed leadership. All training updates address sexual

assault victimology, trauma-informed practices and approaches, areas of special consideration for male victims within the Marine Corps, and overviews of responses to sexual assault trauma to inform their work with people who have been sexually assaulted.

And as of November 1, 2022, the Marine Corps has updated and developed several training elements to include the 40-hour SAPR Victim Advocates training, SAPR annual Noncommissioned Officers training, and Prevention in Action Stakeholders training. Updates for SAPR Annual training for Junior Marines and SAPR annual training for Leaders are currently underway. Concurrently, the Marine Corps will revise our entire approach to SAPR annual training to be more modern, reinforce progressive learning objectives through the ranks, and incorporate research-based, adult learning principles for engaging discussions of sexual assault prevention and response.

Year-round Marines are engaging in conversations about sexual assault more than ever before. Updated annual training, Professional Military Education, and guided discussions are preparing Marines to take an active role in sexual assault prevention, stop behaviors that are destructive to our core values, and be ever ready to respond to someone who needs immediate support. The need for daily application of these values is reinforced in trainings from the beginning of their career and across leadership training. Marines are taught the importance of cohesion, morale, and supportive leadership, and SAPR trainings continue to emphasize that these traits are directly tied to preventing sexual assault.

These skills also target the population that may be at risk for potential offense. We know the first 90 days within a unit have elevated risk of potential harmful acts (victims and offenders). With the information learned through data analysis, we reinforce the importance of command sponsorship programs connecting a new Marine with a seasoned mentor and welcoming them to the family, sustaining the transformation to becoming a United States Marine, and fostering healthy involvement within the community as part of focused efforts to increase noble behaviors and decrease sexual assaults between service members.

The Marine Corps is fully engaged in implementing the Secretary of Defense directed IRC on sexual assault and sexual harassment recommendations. The IRC and Workforce study illuminated the need for additional sexual assault and dedicated prevention-focused staff. These resources will be used to engage in integrated primary prevention and in target sexual assault prevention in ways that will be effective and lead to lasting gains.

The Marine Corps will remain steadfast in holding perpetrators accountable, and commanders and senior enlisted responsible for the climate of their unit.

We are resolute in this endeavor, and it'll remain a focus. Along with the harm it causes to our fellow Marines, our families and to human life, sexual assault and harassment has strategic consequences to our combat readiness. Marines do not tolerate sexual assault, sexual harassment or any behaviors or attitudes that lead to this. All Marines have a responsibility to eradicating this problem and offenders will be held accountable. Period.

SUBSTANCE MISUSE

We're also very focused on Alcohol misuse and illegal use of drugs. The Marine Corps Substance Abuse Program provides training, education, testing programs, and non-medical counseling that inform about low-risk alcohol use and deter Marines from the misuse of alcohol and drugs.

The Drug Demand Reduction Program uses urinalysis smart testing practices to deter the use of illicit drugs and misuse of prescription drugs. Smart testing practices are random, unpredictable, highly visible, and result in a forensically defensible detection program.

Urinalysis testing detects the presence of illicit and prescription drugs, including opiates and delta-8 tetrahydrocannabinol, and THC. One hundred percent of urine samples are now tested for fentanyl, which will assist in efforts to assess fentanyl misuse in the Marine Corps.

Alcohol misuse prevention programs promotes low-risk alcohol use and abstinence through outreach and Prime for Life courses. Prevention Specialists deliver a 4.5-hour course designed for Marines between 18-25 years old to the unit upon the unit's request. The curriculum defines no-risk and low-risk drinking choices. Marines screened and assessed to benefit from additional education may be referred to the Prime for Life 16-hour course. This course helps Marines identify how their drinking choices interact with their biology to increase risk of negative consequences.

The Substance Abuse Program clinical staff offer individual and group counseling that aims to identify motivating factors for high-risk drinking choices, while increasing awareness of consequences and risk if behavioral changes are not made. Clinical staff also deliver aftercare services, which provide an individualized, ongoing, and regulated structure to support service members in maintaining low-risk behaviors.

PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY

Per the National Defense Authorization Act, service members who are a birth or non-birth parent, adopting, or long-term fostering a child, are authorized up to 12 weeks of parental leave and it is in addition to medical convalescent leave, which continues to be available for birth parents recovering from pregnancy. Additionally, service members may request to take the 12 weeks of parental leave in multiple increments of at least one week, which allows for flexibility to meet both family and mission needs. The birth parent is authorized convalescent leave as recommended by the health care provider.

CHILD CARE & CHILD YOUTH PROGRAMS

High-quality childcare is a readiness priority for the Marine Corps and is one of the many important child and youth programs we offer and is key to readiness and retention of our Marine Corps families. It is a readiness priority for the Marine Corps.

We currently have waitlists totaling approximately 1,400 children, primarily at bases in California, North Carolina, Virginia, and Hawaii. The waitlists are caused by a variety of factors, such as a shortage of qualified workers, low pay for qualified workers, high turnover, lengthy hiring process and facilities currently undergoing renovations.

We are addressing childcare waitlist issues through increased hiring and a non-competitive childcare employee transfer program. We added \$135 million to the Child and Youth Program portfolio beginning in FYs 2023 through 2027 to hire more employees at increased wages to help retain a professional workforce. We have also increased salaries of direct care employees, who are also offered priority placement and a childcare fee discount. We will build two new child development centers beginning in 2024, one at Camp Pendleton, CA, and one at Quantico, VA. We also offer childcare fee assistance for eligible Marines who are geographically remote, reside more than 15 miles from an installation, or are assigned to an installation that has a significant waitlist. In FY 2022, nearly 1,400 children were enrolled in the fee assistance program at a total cost of over \$6.1 million. We appreciate the support Congress – and this Subcommittee – have provided to improve childcare delivery in all of its forms.

HOUSING

The Marine Corps is committed to ensuring that the housing on our installations, whether government-owned or privatized, meets life, health, and safety requirements, and provides a positive living experience for Marines and their families. We remain committed to providing the oversight necessary to ensure that privatized housing projects on Marine Corps installations are held accountable for delivering quality housing and for fully complying with their project legal agreements

In addition to the quality-of-life endeavors for our families, we must remain focused on those who are single or unaccompanied. Unaccompanied Housing (UH) supports the Marine Corps Readiness by providing eligible unaccompanied Marines with quality housing and related services.

The Marine Corps UH Inventory consists of 672 barracks buildings with an average age of 32 years and an occupation rate of 98 percent, 16 percent of Marine Corps barracks are in poor or failing condition. This portfolio has a \$24 billion Plant Replacement Value.

In 2022, the Marine Corps renovated 14 barracks that impacted 3,353 Marines.

The Marine Corps plans to renovate 16 barracks in 2023 at a total cost of \$262.2 million and an average cost of \$16.4 million per building. These renovations will enhance the quality of life for 4,763 Marines.

CLOSING

Our Marines, their families and our civilian employees, are the driving force behind our success on and off the battlefield, and the legacy of our American values. My [#1] priority is our people. In order to fight, win and persevere, we need this Committee's support, as well as our American people.

We will continue to demonstrate our capacity to be expeditionary, agile and lethal. As the future remains uncertain, and activities from our foes remain volatile, your Marines are ready to fight. When called upon, we will win. Quality of life affects the mind, body and spirit of a Marine, which impacts our national defense.

We will never give up on providing resources and support to our priority – our people. We will never give up finding the best solutions to sustain our warfighters in war and in garrison. We will never give up providing the most effective programs for our Marines and their families, caregivers, and survivors. We will not rest until we can sustain the high quality, long term support that is necessary to achieve our recruiting and retention mission.

We are thankful for the continued support from Congress and this committee. We must not give up.

Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you again for this opportunity to represent our Nation's finest, your United States Marines. I am grateful for your time and for the attention you're providing to the quality of life of our Marines and their families. Thank you for your unwavering support. Semper Fidelis.