

NOT PUBLIC UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
CONCERNING
MERITOCRACY IN THE MILITARY SERVICES
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Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, and members of the Subcommittee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today on your Marine Corps, specifically the meritocratic principles inherent in our personnel processes.

The United States Marine Corps is a notable example of a meritocratic institution. The Corps takes pride in its commitment to recognizing and rewarding excellence among its ranks in a fair, transparent, and methodical way. A meritocracy, by definition, is a system where advancement, rewards, and opportunities are based on an individual's abilities, achievements, and contributions. The Marine Corps embodies the principles of a meritocracy in its personnel policies. Whether it is accessing, assigning, promoting, awarding, or retaining Marines, the Corps is dedicated to merit-based treatment of its warriors.

This unwavering commitment to equal treatment underscores the Corps' dedication to meritocracy. Marines understand that their advancement and opportunities depend solely on their abilities and achievements – their skills, performance, education, leadership, and character – creating an environment where everyone has an equal opportunity for success.

Meritocracies are essential in our military – and in society at large – because they incentivize excellence, and the Marine Corps is no exception. Marines who earn advanced skill sets, certifications, and qualifications are actively rewarded and encouraged to excel. By doing so, the Corps not only recognizes exceptional performance but also motivates Marines to continually improve themselves. To provide a specific example, the Marine Corps has implemented an officer merit reorder process which allows Marines who have shown elite excellence to promote sooner than their peers.

The commitment to incentivizing excellence extends beyond technical skills. Leadership qualities, discipline, and physical fitness are also highly valued and rewarded. In essence, the Marine Corps offers a clear path for individuals to distinguish themselves and advance based on their merits.

Accessions

Now at the 50th anniversary of the All-Volunteer Force, we are reminded that it is more accurately an “All-Recruited Force.” Recruiting is more challenging today than perhaps ever before. The good news is that our officer recruiting remains strong. By every metric, the quantity and quality of officer candidates is exceptional.

Similarly, the quality of your enlisted Marines remains exceptionally high, and we will never sacrifice this quality. We continue to exceed the Department of Defense (DOD) quality metrics. In short: The Marine Corps continues to make mission and continues to sustain high standards of our all-recruited force. Specifically, the Department of Defense (DOD) requires 90 percent of enlistees to have a high school diploma or equivalent (Education Tier 1) and 60 percent of enlistees to score in the Mental Groups I-III A (mental aptitude). Thus far this year, the Marine Corps has achieved 98 percent for Education Tier 1 and over 65 percent for Mental Group I-III A. We assess zero (0) Tier IVs.

We continue to reach out to all our Nation’s youth to find tomorrow’s Marines. Vital to this success is assigning our best Marines to recruiting duty. Our recruiters reflect the face of the Nation, which is a testament to our intentional efforts to recruit a diverse force. We connect with all communities by assigning Marines to cover every zip code in our Nation and we are constantly striving to reach all qualified youth and their influencers – from the most rural small towns to the largest cities.

However, our enlisted mission challenges remain. In order to ensure recruiting success, we need your help. We need to continue to fund recruiting advertising and facilities, appropriately support

Military Entrance Processing Stations, ensure school access, and bolster a whole-of-Government national dialog on military and public service. Our veterans serve ably in industries, commercial sectors, and government across our Nation, bringing enhanced leadership and an exceptional work ethos back to their communities. We must converge at the highest levels to inform young men and women, and their parents and influencers, about the value of honorable service in uniform.

Junior Enlisted Performance Evaluation System (JEPES)

At the heart of the Marine Corps' meritocracy are transparent and objective evaluation systems. The Junior Enlisted Performance Evaluation System (JEPES) serves as a prime example. JEPES provides a single, comprehensive framework to evaluate and reward talented and high-performing Marines. This system's transparency and objectivity are vital to ensuring that promotions and retention decisions are based on merit.

First, JEPES allows Marines to access their performance evaluations and promotion scores through a user-friendly and mobile-friendly application. This accessibility ensures that every Marine knows precisely on what factors they are being assessed. Transparency is a cornerstone of meritocracy because it empowers individuals to understand their standing and strive for improvement.

Second, JEPES assesses Marines across numerous, specifically outlined, critical dimensions such as warfighting, mental agility, physical toughness, character, mission accomplishment, and leadership. This comprehensive approach ensures that excellence in various aspects of a Marine's duty is recognized and rewarded. In recent internal surveying, 67 percent of enlisted Marines and 82 percent of officers reported that they believe the performance evaluation system is fairer in the Marine Corps than in the private sector. These statistics demonstrate that Marines themselves perceive the meritocratic nature of their institution positively.

Promotion and Assignment Policy

The Marine Corps' selection processes for promotions and key assignments, such as command, begin with our selection standard of "*best and fully qualified.*" Whether governed by statute or Service policies, our selection board processes are chartered to ensure that Marines of every race, religion, color, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and national origin are given fair and equitable consideration.

Our officer promotion selection boards are statutory and grounded in law. Title 10 governs the conduct of officer promotion boards from pre-board actions to post-board reports. We execute these events by convening a board, preparing records of all eligible Marines, presenting the records using a standardized briefing format to all board members, and then conducting iterations of anonymous voting to select the best and fully qualified. Board membership includes Marines of diverse gender, ethnicity, and rank with representation from military occupational specialties throughout the Fleet Marine Forces.

The Marine Corps applies the same rigor and deliberate execution across all selection boards. As an example, we convene boards to select our best and fully qualified officers for command – not only at the O-5 and O-6 level – but importantly for our Recruiting Station Commanding Officers (RSCOs), and for Professional Military Education. These boards are developed using diverse board membership, precepts, and legal review consistent with Title 10 boards to ensure fair and equitable consideration for the awesome responsibility of commanding Marines and for the important career opportunities provided through advanced education programs.

As for assignments, the Marine Corps' policies expressly direct that the Corps "will ensure equal opportunity in assignments for all Marines without regard to color, race, ethnicity, religion, age, national origin, marital status (except for dual-military couples), gender, and sexual orientation."

Retention

Ultimately, the success of the Marine Corps' meritocratic approach is reflected in Marine satisfaction. Marines are discerning individuals who demand fairness and accountability. They vote with their feet, and our historically high retention rates in Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023 suggests that they believe the Corps treats them fairly, cares about their satisfaction, and values their careers and quality of life.

Not only did the Corps exceed its retention goals in FY22 and FY23, but we also saw a significant year-over-year increase in the objective quality of Marines reenlisting, resulting in a more mature and capable force. Marines choose to "stay Marine" because they have confidence that their careers will be determined by their excellence in leadership, job performance, skills, education, discipline, and physical fitness. This trust in the meritocratic principles of the Corps is a driving force behind its sustained success.

In conclusion, the Marine Corps has an enduring commitment to recruiting, developing, and retaining elite warriors through policies and personnel processes that are fair and transparent. Its focus on choosing the "best and fully qualified" Marines to meet the nation's needs ensures that meritocracy remains at the core of its culture and values. The Marine Corps expects and holds high standards. Marine leaders identify and reward excellence and our Marines earn opportunities through dedication, hard work, talent, and commitment. This will never change.

Thank you and Semper Fidelis.