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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBJECT: ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE FOR MANPOWER AND
RESERVE AFFAIRS WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION: IMPACTS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
AND THE ARMED SERVICES

STATEMENT OF:

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, and distinguished members of this subcommittee, I am proud to testify today on the Department of the Air Force's efforts to recruit, retain, and leverage the power of a diverse and inclusive force. Our people provide the United States with one of its greatest strategic advantages over our adversaries on the modern battlefield and in the skies and space above. While we are focused not only on the talent required to deter and—when necessary—deny and defeat our competitors, we also must be mindful that we are also competing with the private sector for America's best. We are working every day to recruit and retain a capable and dedicated workforce and taking steps to ensure that our diverse Nation sees our military as an employer of choice.

The Department of the Air Force (DAF) remains focused on implementing the National Defense Strategy (NDS) and the priorities of the Secretary of Defense: mission, people, and teams. Our first duty is to expertly perform our wide-ranging missions, and everything we are doing to support and develop our people and build strong teams advances that goal. Although the Air Force and Space Force are often viewed as high-tech, platform-centric services; our strength and difference-maker is the ingenuity, problem-solving skills, collaboration, and dedication of our 700,000 person Total Force military and civilian Airmen and Guardians. From pilots and mechanics to intelligence analysts, medics, and security forces, each member of America's Air and Space Forces plays a critical role in ensuring that the organization is prepared to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. As the People's Republic of China seeks to increasingly compete with us technologically in the air and space domains, I believe that the diversity of the United States—including racial and gender, but also regional, cultural, socioeconomic, and intellectual diversity—is what distinguishes our force and provides us unique advantages on today's battlefield as well as the battlefield of the future. The DAF's diversity and inclusion efforts are informed by science and business best practices, congressional mandates, data-focused policy reviews and assessments, and the lived experiences of Airmen and Guardians working together every day.

RECRUITING A FORCE THAT RESONATES WITH AMERICA

A diverse and inclusive environment matters to the population we are recruiting, and we cannot populate the force without appealing to the broadest possible cross-section of society. The Nation's changing demographics demand that specific and sustained attention and effort be focused on developing new relationships in communities across America. We need America's most talented people to join us, whether they be recent high school graduates or experienced professionals. In return, we provide exceptional opportunities to build a rewarding career, operate some of the most world's sophisticated technological platforms, serve on an exceptional team, and ensure their families are supported.

Innovation thrives when all employees feel included and valued by their organizations. Not only do they take more responsibility and contribute exponentially, but they dare to think more creatively and are enabled to apply moral courage to lead decisively when faced with complex national security challenges. The Air and Space Forces operate in a concept of a team of teams; they cannot succeed any other way. The National Academies of Sciences looked at how teams interact and achieve top results and found that diverse teams routinely outperform homogenous teams due to their greater functional diversity. We see this every day in our force: a cohesive, diverse team is one of our greatest strengths. We strive to nurture, expand, and increase the positive impact of diverse teams performing missions around the world.

America's racial and ethnic demographics are evolving rapidly, while propensity to serve is at near-

record lows. If we do not take steps to deliberately increase propensity among the fastest expanding demographic groups, we risk the future of the All-Volunteer force. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2045 there will be no single racial demographic majority. By 2050, 54% of the population will comprise currently underrepresented groups (i.e., any race other than non-Hispanic, single-race whites) and one-third will be Hispanic. Furthermore, a variety of cultural and historical factors that defined a previous era of conflict has resulted in underrepresentation of women in the Force. Although women comprise half our population, they currently represent only 21.5% of our Total Force DAF service members, 23.5% of our officer corps, 7.4% of our pilots, and just under 14% of our general officers. The Airmen and Guardians of 2023 need to be physically fit, mentally strong, creative, and resilient to operate and employ the most advanced and technologically sophisticated platforms our defense industrial base can develop—and many, many women meet these requirements. These efforts must also be inclusive beyond race and gender. Recent Gallup polling data finds that 7% of all Americans and about 20% of Generation Z—those born from 1997 to 2004—identified as LGBT in 2021 and 2022. Expanding recruiting efforts and options for service among this expanding group is necessary to avoid missing out on critical talent resident in our country

Finally, our forces operate in the spotlight on a global stage and don't go to war alone. Cultivating a diverse force enhances our ability to bridge cultural and language barriers and enhance combat effectiveness. When the militaries of Allies, partners, and friends see people that look like them, speak their language, and appreciate their culture in our force, it facilitates understanding and acceptance that is difficult to quantify and virtually impossible to achieve otherwise.

So what is the DAF doing to recruit a force that represents America and keeps us competitive with the private sector in the race for talent? For the first time, a majority of youth have never considered the military and only 23% of youth are qualified without a waiver. With the challenging recruiting environment and low propensity to serve, we must expand our recruiting and retention efforts to grow propensity among previously untapped markets of diverse talent. Anyone eligible to serve, who meets our high standards, and is courageous enough to pledge that they'll support and defend the Constitution, should be able to do so.

The DAF has a series of initiatives underway that I believe will tangibly impact our ability to recruit and meet near-term needs.

Reaching Untapped Markets

It is imperative that the composition of our military services better reflect the population of our Nation. Last August, the Secretary of the Air Force published updated goals for racial, ethnic, and gender diversity for all three sources of officer commissioning (the U.S. Air Force Academy, Reserve Officer Training Corps, and Officer Training School). Informed by strategic guidance, these aspirational goals will (1) ensure that Air and Space Force officers are representative of America's demographic changes, (2) align resources to invest in our long-term objectives, and (3) not be implemented in a way that undermines any of our merit-based processes. The plans that are being developed in response to these goals represent the largest collection of diversity and inclusion outreach efforts since 2014 and we are poised to meet many of these goals no later than 2028. Some examples include targeted brand awareness in congressional districts with large demographic populations underrepresented in our force, deeper involvement with professional organizations representing these populations, and improving influencer engagement through nationwide targeted marketing and advertising.

Furthermore, the Air Force Recruiting Service (AFRS) has stood up a specific detachment to inform, influence, and inspire tomorrow's leaders through innovative outreach opportunities. This

detachment focuses on pre-accession audiences (youth, young adults, and influencers) and works with partners to provide pathways to officer and enlisted accession sources. Our General Officer (GO) Inspire Program enables our most senior leaders to engage with youth and youth influencers (parents, teachers, coaches, civic/community leaders, etc.) in an effort to increase diversity in the the Air Force's rated community (i.e., pilots, combat systems officers, air battle managers and remotely piloted aircraft pilots). The "We Are All Recruiters" (WEAR) initiative provides active-duty Airmen permissive temporary duty status to participate in an event that directly supports DAF recruiting efforts, enabling members to go back into their home communities and raise awareness about the mission and the wide variety of careers we offer. The detachment also has a team specifically focused on rated diversity that has reached out to flying units to garner support in the recruiting mission. From Hawaii to Puerto Rico and everywhere in between, the detachment is focused on outreach and engagement with diverse populations and interests. Over the past three years AFRS established the Aviation Inspiration Mentorship (AIM) Program to support community engagements that inform, influence, and inspire the next generation of Air Force aviators. Today there are more than 30 participating AIM flying wings across the Nation with over 500 participants. In addition, AFRS established the AIM High flight academy, which offers more than 200 youth an opportunity to learn to fly (around 70% of the participants come from underrepresented groups).

We also realize we need to do more to engage the women of America to showcase the opportunities inherent in our unique mission: essentially, *you can't be it if you can't see it*. Recently, the DAF fully funded a campaign to build an enduring Air Force relationship with female athletes and their influencers through direct marketing and athletic partnerships that encourage female participation in sports. In the coming months, this campaign will feature female-focused creative media around the FIFA Women's World Cup on Fox Sports, YouTube, and Hulu; establishment of female youth athlete partnerships (e.g., little league softball, Play Like a Girl initiative, etc.); and a new paid influencer program to shine a spotlight on past and present USAF female athletes and Olympic hopefuls. This effort is only the start of an enduring campaign program to attract and recruit athletic, diverse talent into the force by *growing* propensity to serve.

RETAINING A DIVERSE FORCE DEMANDS INTENTIONAL INCLUSION EFFORTS

To meet the threats facing the force of today and in the future, the DAF is deliberately implementing the NDS's priority of cultivating and caring for the adaptive, engaged, diverse, skilled, resilient, and ready workforce required to creatively solve national security challenges in a complex global environment.

FY21 NDAA's Diversity and Inclusion Requirements

With this imperative in mind, and as required by section 551 of the FY21 NDAA, the DAF recruited a Senior Advisor to the Secretary of the Air Force and established the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (SAF/DI) to specifically advance efforts that ensure all Airmen and Guardians thrive. This also broadly aligns with the goals of E.O. 14035 on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce. The law also charged the DAF to "define conscious and unconscious bias with respect to matters of diversity and inclusion, and provide guidance to eliminate such bias," and we are addressing this requirement at all levels including Basic Military Training, Officer Training School, Reserve Officer Training Corps, and the United States Air Force Academy. These provisions further instructed the Department to develop plans and policies to address diversity and inclusion barriers across the military lifecycle starting with recruitment and accession and requires annual meetings of senior leadership across the departments to provide a forum to assess progress towards diversity and inclusion goals and share advice.

Finally, section 503 of the law mandated a new requirement to ensure that officer promotion boards “represent the diverse population of the armed force concerned to the extent practicable.” To accomplish this, we ensure compliance with the requirement when selecting board membership; we track racial, ethnic, and gender outcomes in officer promotion boards; and review and assess the extent to which any disparities appear in the post-promotion board analysis.

Commitment to Eliminate Disparities and Strengthen Our Team

The Department of the Air Force (DAF) initiated its own series of reviews in 2020 and 2021 to assess racial disparity in personnel development, military discipline, and career opportunities in the DAF. The December 2020 Independent Racial Disparity Review (RDR) focused on disparities in discipline and career opportunities affecting Black Airmen and Guardians. The September 2021 Independent Disparity Review (DR) expanded the RDR by reviewing disparities in discipline and career opportunities for women, as well as Asians, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, and Hispanic/Latino racial and ethnic minorities.

The reviews were conducted through five lines of effort: (1) anonymous surveys, (2) written feedback to DAF Inspector General (IG), (3) feedback through the DAF IG telephone and email hotline, (4) individual interviews of senior leaders, subject matter experts, and service members, and (5) in-person group discussions with Airmen and Guardians.

Collectively, the disparity reviews confirmed the existence of racial and ethnic disparities in the following areas across DAF: law enforcement apprehensions, criminal investigations, military justice, administrative separations, placement into occupational career fields, certain promotion rates, professional military educational opportunities and career development. Analysis revealed that these disparities impact racial and ethnic groups in different degrees and in different ways.

A few striking examples include:

- Enlisted Black service members were 72% more likely than White service members to receive non-judicial punishment (NJP) under Article 15, Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) and 57% more likely than White service members to face courts-martial.
- Enlisted Native American service members were 108% more likely to receive NJP and 113% more likely to face courts-martial than their White peers.
- As a whole, minority groups were underrepresented in officer accessions. The greatest disparity was in the operations career fields, specifically, pilot accessions.
- Hispanic/Latino members were promoted below the average rate to all ranks except E7.
- The likelihood of female service members separating is 28% higher than males.

Following these reviews, the DAF implemented a number of initiatives focused on addressing disparities across the range of military justice and personnel practices. These initiatives are continuously evaluated to verify that the responsible organizations are making progress, and eventually, when there is enough subsequent trend data, will be evaluated to see whether there are measurable reductions in the disparities they are aimed to address. Such efforts include adopting a “preponderance of evidence” standard of proof for nonjudicial punishment actions to provide transparency to increase overall trust in the process within the force; collecting racial/ethnic demographic data on administrative paperwork to determine if there is disparate treatment at early career stages, which could have long-term career impacts; and revamping the professional military education in-residence selection process to offer more equitable opportunities for career advancement and promotion.

One Team, One Fight: Benefitting from Intentional Inclusion

Finally, DAF reinforced the requirement for functional communities to conduct barrier analysis annually and rechartered Barrier Analysis Working Groups (BAWGs) to invite volunteers from across the DAF— in an additional duty capacity – to identify barriers to service. Our BAWGs are a conduit to maximize our Total Force’s diverse talents and create an inclusive culture that enables every Airmen or Guardian to ensure their skills and talents are focused on the mission. They further underscore that our efforts at creating a more inclusive force are not only being driven at the leadership level, but also through the grassroots initiatives of our Airmen and Guardians.

I work hand in hand with the BAWGs, as their voices and proposals help inform our policies designed to recruit and retain while fostering an inclusive total force by distinguishing the DAF as an employer of choice in a competitive labor market. In addition to helping the Department plan robust heritage month recognition events, both at headquarters but also across DAF installations and commands, recent examples of BAWG contributions include:

- Provided direct feedback to the Uniform Board, which led to an updated policy for female hairstyles, ultimately ensuring inclusivity for those with a variety of hair densities and textures.
- Highlighted the improper identification of Puerto Rico as an “overseas location” resulting in simplifying the process for members of Puerto Rican descent to travel home.
- Influenced an updated DAF convalescent leave policy for Airmen and Guardians who experience a miscarriage or stillbirth, allowing them the time to heal and recover.

Finally, the DAF is committed to supporting our Airmen and Guardians by ensuring that they can serve to their fullest potential in a climate rooted in dignity and respect. Our culture must prevent harmful behaviors, such as sexual harassment and assault, domestic violence, and suicide, while holding those who undermine our values accountable. Faithful and deliberate implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military, the DAF’s 90-day review of domestic violence survivor experiences announced last month, and our thorough assessment of the recently released Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Commission’s recommendations each serve to advance retention, support quality of service, and strengthen readiness.

CONCLUSION

The DAF’s focused efforts to advance diversity and inclusion are not new to the national security enterprise. This year, the Department of Defense celebrates the 75th Anniversary of racial integration of the Force and it was the leadership of the newly established U.S. Air Force that proved one of integration’s strongest advocates. Additionally, we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the All-Volunteer Force—a decision that set us on the path to building and maintaining the best trained, best equipped, most professional fighting force in the world. To sustain the All-Volunteer Force for the next 50 years we must create an environment where every American sees service as a viable option for them, their children, or grandchildren and all are fully invested in the success of our Nation’s military.

Diversity is one of America’s greatest assets and a critical advantage we have over near peer competitors. The simultaneous rapid transformation of today’s warfighting environment and evolving U.S. demographics both drive the need for innovative approaches to attract, recruit, develop, and retain top talent or we risk losing high-quality Airmen and Guardians, our credibility, and our ability to secure our future.

The commitment of our Airmen, Guardians, and their families is a testament to our success and we must continue to support and sustain it for the next 50 years and beyond. We look forward to

continuing to partner with you.