

NOT PUBLIC UNTIL RELEASED BY THE  
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

**STATEMENT**

**OF**

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**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**

**BEFORE THE**

**MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE**

**OF THE**

**SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**CONCERNING**

**MILITARY PERSONNEL**

**ON**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, it is my privilege to appear before you today to provide testimony on Marine Corps personnel. Our Commandant has provided clear guidance on Marine Corps priorities and the individual Marine remains the bedrock. We will continue to focus on recruiting the best and most qualified young Americans who seek the challenge of becoming a Marine. We will invest in their personal and professional development and retain the very best who demonstrate the courage, discipline, critical skills, and ethos that make the Marine Corps the Nation's most lethal warfighting organization.

## **MARINE CORPS EFFICIENCY**

The Marine Corps has always been a lean organization. We do not ask for more than we need, and we hold sacred the funding which the American people trust to us. We are proud to report that we attained a clean audit in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 – the first in the Department of Defense's history – and sustained that clean audit in FY 2024. We accomplished this with a great deal of hard work and dedication and by leveraging and modernizing our technology - automating our system interfaces and streamlining the functionality of our systems and related business processes. What it means is that, when the Corps is provided a taxpayer dollar, we can show where and how it has been invested – a responsibility we take very seriously. Readiness for the warfighter means being accountable for our assets, knowing where they are, and in what condition they can be found, at a moment's notice. The Marine Corps' commitment to combat readiness, lethality, accountability, and discipline are enhanced with every dollar with which we are entrusted.

## **RECRUITING**

The significance of Marine Corps recruiting efforts is highlighted by the fact that all officer, enlisted, regular, reserve, and prior service recruiting efforts fall under the Marine Corps Recruiting Command (MCRC), the Commanding General of which reports directly to the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC).

Despite continued challenges, we are winning at recruiting. Your Marine Corps once again made its recruiting mission in FY 2024 and is currently on track to meet it again this FY. Service as a Marine continues to attract those who meet our standards and aspire to prove themselves worthy of earning the title. Importantly, we have achieved our recruiting missions while exceeding all DoD quality standards; we will not lower our standards.

We must collectively ensure the health of our All-Volunteer Force and the strategic advantage it provides – talent, capability, and warfighting excellence. The CMC remains committed to providing resources and sending the very best Marines to become recruiters in order to achieve the accession mission while sustaining quality and standards. One in four of our general officers have been recruiters during their career, and we pride ourselves in assigning a sergeant major to every recruiting station, and a recruiter to every zip code in our Nation. This is the bedrock of successful Marine Corps recruiting.

We are thankful for this Committee – and to all of Congress – for passing into law an increase in tuition assistance for our Platoon Leaders Course. This will help to modernize a program which aims to attract more highly qualified officers earlier in their educational endeavors. This will greatly assist our Officer Selection Officers in their efforts to find the next generation of Marine leaders.

Despite our success, we must remain mindful of the long-game – that recruiting will continue to be difficult into the future. Our delayed entry program is where these future Marines are first trained and educated on what it takes to be a Marine. Historically, we have started each fiscal year with a pool of approximately 50 percent of our recruiting mission. In FY 2023, this fell to 22 percent, as we leveraged the pool to ensure mission accomplishment. This required Marine recruiters to focus on finding individuals to ship in the near-term, impacting their time to physically and mentally prepare for the rigors of the transformation process to Marine. The good news is that we built the pool back up to 28 percent last year and are on track to be well over 30 percent this year. Our success has been the combined results of leadership, increasing our recruiting force, re-aligning recruiters and recruiting assets, increased advertising, and efforts to streamline applicant medical processing.

The Marine Corps advertising program is essential to building awareness among high quality populations that are increasingly unfamiliar with military service. Advertising funds repay many times over, producing lower first-term attrition, higher quality Marines, and increased readiness. Robust and sustained advertising funding is essential, now more than ever.

We thank Congress for its continued support for recruiter access to high schools and colleges. The FY 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) provided additional timeliness guidelines for recruiter access to directory lists. However, continued vigilance is essential to ensure that recruiters have consistent and quality access to ensure the ability to recruit the best. The single biggest reason we hear from young people for not joining the Corps is that they simply were not made aware of the opportunity. Maintaining meaningful access to high schools and student directories remains a top priority for the Marine Corps. We will certainly continue to come to Congress with new ideas to further improve recruiting.

## **RETENTION**

As a result of Force Design, we shifted from a “recruit and replace” to an “invest and retain” model with immediate positive results. We are transitioning to a more experienced enlisted force characterized by increased retention and contract utilization; this will give us the technical and leadership intensive skills necessary on 21st-century battlefields. At the same time, the service is increasing investment in quality of life and quality of service initiatives most closely related to the care and retention of Marines and their families. Major reform initiatives implemented in recent years such as the Commandant’s Retention Program and the extended first term alignment plan retention model are continuing to secure our highest performing Marines for reenlistment at earlier points in their career. At the same time, we are implementing new initiatives such as the Enlisted Career Designation Program, which, for the first time this year, will offer our most experienced Marines the opportunity to reenlist for the duration of their careers, rather than force them to reenlist at regular intervals. All efforts are focused on sustaining combat readiness by increasing the number of trained, experienced, and deployable Marines across the total force.

Overall, we are retaining Marines with the right skills and talent at a historic pace. This reinforces that once an individual becomes a Marine, they want to “stay Marine.” We achieved historic retention in FY 2023 and FY 2024 and we will exceed mission again in FY 2025. The desire for continued service speaks to our ethos – being part of a team, accomplishing the mission, taking care of one another, and serving something bigger than self. It reinforces that Marines value their service to our Corps and Country and the high standards we demand of our Marines.

Key components of our retention strategy are re-enlistment bonuses and quality of life initiatives; we thank you for your support of these. One main initiative for your Marines in the strategic Indo-Pacific area of operations was very simple – to allow shipment of more than one vehicle when a Marine had a family member of driving age. This authority supports the Marine, the spouse who needs to get to work or transport a child to childcare, or the spouse or child that needs to get to school. It is a big deal to those who we send to these remote locations overseas.

Despite these successes, the retention environment is competitive. We continue to experience challenges retaining certain communities, like aviation, cyber, and some of our intelligence specialties. Of particular importance is aviation retention. Assessments have shown this must be viewed holistically and cannot be solved by bonuses alone. We are exploring monetary and non-monetary incentives, to include improving aircraft readiness rates and flying hours, and increasing the production pipeline throughput, all of which support increased operational readiness.

We thank Congress – especially this Subcommittee – for the incentives, flexibilities, and special pays you have authorized. They enable the development of better strategic talent pools and increase access to our talent for longer periods and with more options to better access and match it to warfighting requirements.

## **COMPENSATION**

Competitive compensation is a foundation of the all-volunteer force with impacts to both recruiting and retention. Currently, basic pay and accompanying benefits, such as housing, medical care, bonuses and allowances, and tax advantages, are very competitive. According to the recent DoD 14<sup>th</sup> Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation, pay for officers is in the top

24 percent of pay as compared to their civilian counterparts; for enlisted, it is in the top 17 percent. We appreciate Congress' 4.5 percent basic pay increase for Marines.

We continue to use both monetary and non-monetary incentives to retain, match, and assign Marines to billets that are appropriate for their experience and skill. Selective Retention Bonuses for active and reserve Marines allow shaping specific personnel requirements by targeting critical military occupational specialties and supporting lateral movement of Marines to these billets. We continue to be proactive in the retention campaign by designing complementary monetary and non-monetary incentive packages tailored to individual Marines with unique desires and aspirations.

### **TALENT MANAGEMENT**

The Marine Corps is a notable example of a meritocratic institution. The Corps takes pride in commitment to recognizing and rewarding excellence among its ranks in a fair, transparent, and methodical way. Whether it is accessing, assigning, promoting, awarding, or retaining Marines, we remain dedicated to merit-based principles. To remain the most ready and lethal force, we capitalize on the knowledge, skills, abilities, performance, and potential of every Marine, and provide each Marine opportunity for success on their merits.

To further increase our readiness and lethality, we are modernizing how we manage our talent. The overarching goal of Talent Management (TM) is to increase Marine Corps combat capability and remain the premier expeditionary force-in-readiness. TM requires that we recruit and retain the best talent, modernize the assignment process consistent with our warfighting philosophy, introduce new measures to increase career flexibility, and utilize modern digital tools, processes, and analytics, with transparency. Much like the overarching approach to Force

Design, TM is a multi-year, total force effort – a service-wide strategic design process that we are executing. Some of our proven talent management initiatives include:

- Commandant's Retention Program (CRP) identifies the most competitive Marines and offers them an opportunity to stay a Marine via pre-approved reenlistment. Since its introduction in FY 2023, over 4,000 high-performing Marines have chosen to reenlist under CRP.
- Enlisted Career Designation Pilot (ECDP) provides greater stability and career certainty for senior enlisted Marines, allowing Eligible E-8 and E-9 Marines can voluntarily opt into the ECDP upon reenlistment, committing to an additional 24 months of service and potentially extending their careers to their desired end date up to their enlisted career force control dates for their current rank.
- Direct Affiliation Program (DAP) affords qualified Active Component Marines the opportunity to seamlessly transition to the Reserve Component with no break in service. As of February 2025, we've accomplished more than 40 percent of our FY goal, which equates to over 800 warfighting Marines ready to serve our Nation in the Reserves.
- Special Duty Assignment (SDA) Volunteer Program allows Marines to provide duty station preference for recruiter, drill instructor, and combat instructor billets if they volunteer for them. Since its initial inception during the FY23 SDA Campaign, this program has sustained an 86 percent average increase in total volunteer assignments, significantly reducing involuntary screenings and improving career satisfaction and retention.
- Sequenced Professional Military Education (PME) Staff Non-Commissioned Officer (SNCO) Promotion Selection Model increases the number of Marines that our enlisted promotion selection boards may consider eligible for promotion. As of March 2025, 746 Marines across the total force have promoted under this initiative. These additional SNCOs would have



otherwise not been eligible and passed for promotion. Our standards have not changed. Once selected, Marines must still complete all PME requirements for grade before delivery of their promotion.

- Staff Non-Commissioned Officer (SNCO) Alternate Selection List incentivizes strong performance and provides the service with an additional TM mechanism to mitigate risk to mission. As of March 2025, we have activated 113 alternates for promotion – directly enhancing overall readiness by reducing potential gaps in our formations.
- Increasing Lateral Movement incentivizes qualified Marines to transition into high-demand, low-density MOSs.
- Promotion Opt-Out allows officers to opt out of promotion without penalty and enables them to complete a broadening assignment, advanced education, career progression requirement, or other assignment.

Other initiatives in development:

- Improved MOS Assignment will be a better, more predictive, data-driven matching tool that will optimally align applicant interest, Primary Military Occupational Specialty (PMOS) skill requirements, and the needs of the Marine Corps.
- Retention Prediction Network (RPN) is currently being developed to identify a potential recruit's likelihood to enlist and continue to serve through their first enlistment and beyond. RPN is a multi-year collaborative effort with academia that harnessed vast quantities of manpower data to provide data-informed talent management decisions.
- Talent Marketplace will modernize the current assignments system with a Total Force, transparent, data-based environment that allows Marines, commands, and duty assignment professionals to collaborate on the assignments process. At full implementation, the

marketplace is envisioned to utilize advanced analytics supported by artificial intelligence and machine learning elements to enable a market-style assignment system.

- Total Force Retention System 2.0 (TFRS 2.0) is being deployed this year and will leverage a fully digital platform to support the first term alignment plan reenlistment campaign, resulting in a modern user experience and significant reduction in processing time.

TM success will remain dependent on modern technology systems, and we continue to modernize our IT portfolio – consolidating older, disparate systems into a small subset of interoperable, multi-faceted applications that ride on a single IT system hosted in the cloud. Cloud migration allows IT efficiencies and effectively scaled applications, databases, and services across the enterprise to meet emergent requirements in a dynamic environment. As we migrate to the cloud, we will be able to optimize and capitalize on the promise of artificial intelligence and machine learning. Our vision of cloud-based, application-accessible platforms must move at the “speed of relevance.” The goal is to have modern technology with increased capabilities to enable the management of Marines’ careers.

## **RESERVES**

As a vital component of a fully integrated Total Force, the Marine Corps Reserve delivers responsive, joint capable, combat-ready units and individuals to the Naval and Joint Force, fulfilling warfighting requirements for contingencies and crisis response across the entire competition continuum. Aligned with ongoing Force Design modernization, the Reserves continue to adapt to meet contemporary and evolving warfighting challenges. By actively contributing to the National Defense Strategy, the Reserves enhance operational effectiveness by participating in strategic exercises, fostering critical partnerships, and supporting operational commands. Resources are prioritized to deliver robust and immersive training opportunities,

cultivating a ready and resilient force, and fostering a profound sense of purpose among reservists in defense of the Nation.

Bonus programs support the retention of experienced drilling reservists and incentivize direct affiliation of Marines transitioning from the active component. Bonuses also enable ambitious yet attainable reserve recruiting missions throughout the fiscal year. Together, these recruiting and retention initiatives populate reserve formations with high-performing Marines, stabilizing unit readiness and contributing to the readiness and lethality of your Marine Corps.

### **CIVILIAN WORKFORCE**

Our civilian employees – both appropriated and non-appropriated funded – support the mission and daily functions of the Marine Corps and are an integral part of our Total Force. Our civilian workforce is lean – with only one civilian for every nine Marines, compared to 1:2 for DoD as a whole. They exemplify our core values; embrace esprit de corps, teamwork, and pride in belonging to our Nation’s Corps of Marines; and serve alongside our Marines throughout the world, in every occupation and at every level. A large majority of our civilians work outside the Washington, DC, beltway at 57 bases, stations, depots, and installations around the world. Fifty-nine percent of our civilians are veterans who have chosen to continue to serve our Nation; of those, 23 percent are disabled veterans. Many others are spouses of Marines. Our civilians steadfastly continue to provide vital support to our Marines, reserve Marines, their families, and our wounded, ill, and injured. They continue to truly show themselves as Semper Fidelis by keeping our Marines and their families in the forefront.

### **TAKING CARE OF MARINES AND THEIR FAMILIES**

Warfighting capabilities are not just built on unit training; they are also built on trust and meeting the other operational needs that support overall wellness of our Marines and their

families. Marines rely on the institution to provide their families with stability. To that end, we recognize the importance of Marine and family predictability and support it as a major line of effort for successfully achieving combat readiness.

Marine Corps Total Fitness (MCTF) is an integrated system of health, wellness, prevention, and performance capabilities that enable the readiness, lethality, and resilience of individual Marines and enhance the well-being of Marine families. MCTF is our primary prevention delivery mechanism and a proactive, holistic approach to prevention and wellness, program delivery, resource management, infrastructure development, and policy design. MCTF emphasizes four domains of fitness – mental, spiritual, social, and physical. It also recognizes other foundational building blocks for wellness such as sleep, nutrition, medical/dental care, and financial, environmental, and occupational fitness.

Our Warrior Athlete Readiness and Resilience centers prioritize the Marine warfighter who is closest to the fight and recognize that meeting Marines’ operational needs are inseparable components of mission success. We engage Marines and families where they work, train, live, and naturally congregate to create greater accessibility, sustainability, affordability, and benefit. We help Marines and families build life skills that contribute to holistic wellness: coping and problem-solving strategies, stress identification and mitigation, healthy relationships and boundaries, and peer-to-peer mentorship and support. We appreciate Congress’ support of our integrated prevention strategy to combat harmful behaviors and improve the readiness, performance, and resiliency of the Corps and our families.

### **Suicide Prevention**

A life lost to suicide is tragic. Suicide prevention remains a top priority for Marine Corps leaders. Suicide is also a critical issue across the United States; the current US suicide rate is the

highest since 1941. Marine Corps' efforts to reduce suicides include implementing Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee recommendations, expanding our integrated prevention efforts, and promoting MCTF to reduce suicides by strengthening the social, spiritual, mental, and physical health of our people. Our Unit Marine Awareness and Prevention Integrated Training and Operational Stress Control and Readiness training focus on primary prevention and early intervention basics. The Prevention in Action training for leaders and stakeholders outlines a comprehensive approach to prevention. We have also fully implemented the Brandon Act, which ensures Marines are educated on all options to seek care, including the option to voluntarily seek help through an officer or SNCO supervisor and initiate a referral for a mental health evaluation. Part of our effort will always be to encourage every Marine to use the care and services available – and we need to make sure that mental health care is easily accessible. Nationwide shortages of health care personnel and providers have created significant challenges for accessing quality, timely health care, especially in more remote and overseas locations.

### **Sexual Assault/Sexual Harassment Prevention**

The Marine Corps values every Marine and is committed to fostering a culture where all Marines feel safe in their unit and where the crimes of sexual assault and sexual harassment are eradicated. The Marine Corps Sexual Assault Prevention & Response program encourages prevention, reporting, investigation, and prosecution of these criminal behaviors to the fullest extent. We remain steadfast in holding perpetrators appropriately accountable for their crimes and commanders and senior enlisted leaders accountable for the climate of their units. We also provide training and education to Marines, Sailors, dependents, and eligible civilians to foster an environment where sexual assault and harassment of any kind is not tolerated and provide

guidance on how to respond and report. We appreciate Congress' support as we continue these efforts.

### **Family Support**

Permanent Change of Station (PCS) Flexibility. The Marine Corps continues to prioritize stability for units and reducing the stress placed on Marines and their families. PCS moves, while essential, can be disruptive. Through TM, we seek to further increase PCS and permanent change of assignment (PCA) flexibilities, balancing the needs of the individual Marine's career, their family, and the service.

Childcare. High quality childcare is one of the many important child and youth programs we offer. It is a readiness priority for the Marine Corps. Our child development centers currently serve more than 40,000 children, and we have waitlists for 800 children, primarily at Camp Pendleton, Hawaii, Quantico, MCAS Beaufort/MCRD Parris Island, and Camp Lejeune/New River. While waitlists are caused by a variety of factors, we share the national challenge of employee turnover rates. We are addressing childcare waitlist issues through several initiatives, to include a non-competitive childcare employee transfer program. More than 40 percent of our direct care childcare employees are Marine spouses, which contributes to the annual turnover rate due to PCS. The non-competitive transfer program enables employees to seamlessly transfer from their current position to one at a different installation. This has provided dividends, allowing us to retain more than 180 spouse employees we may have otherwise lost.

We also offer childcare fee assistance for eligible Marines who are assigned to an installation with a significant waitlist or who are not stationed near a DoD childcare facility. Over the past three fiscal years, the rate of fee assistance utilization has increased steadily for both community-based childcare providers as well as children served. In FY 2024, more than

1,800 children were enrolled in the fee assistance program with 733 community-based providers, at a total cost of \$8.7 million.

Spouse Employment. Spouse employment is also important for many Marine Corps families and can be a significant factor in their financial security, readiness, and retention. The Family Member Employment Assistance Program provides employment-related referral services, career and skill assessments, career coaching, job search guidance, portable career opportunities, and education center referrals/guidance. Additionally, to support our spouses who work within Marine Corps Community Services, we released the Relocation Tool within the personnel system to allow spouses to identify their next Marine Corps duty station ahead of their move, which fosters direct transfers and career continuity. We also reimburse eligible Marine spouses up to \$1,000 for state licensure and certification and other business costs arising from relocation to another state and have supported 511 spouses thus far. We appreciate Congress' recent expansion of this program and continued support.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our highest priority will always be recruiting, developing, and retaining elite warriors in the highest state of combat readiness to support and defend this great nation. Every initiative that we undertake must demonstrably and logically contribute to readiness and lethality. Our measure of success is a Marine Corps with improved performance in combat which enables us to fulfill our Congressional mandate to be 'most ready when the nation is least ready,' today and on the battlefields of the future. Today, we stand ready to do exactly that.

Semper Fidelis.