

NOT PUBLIC UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT
OF
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UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL
OF THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
CONCERNING
MILITARY PERSONNEL POSTURE
ON
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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, it is my privilege to appear before you today to provide an overview on Marine Corps personnel.

Since our founding in 1775, Marines have answered our Nation's call, faithfully serving the American people and maintaining a world class standard of military excellence. Your Marine Corps is, and will continue to be, our Nation's expeditionary force in readiness. We will be ready to rapidly respond to crises around the Globe to ensure the continued security of the American people and to protect the interests that underpin our Nation. Marines will be *always faithful* to the trust which the American people have vested in them.

OUR PEOPLE

Marines are the foundation of the Marine Corps. They are the Corps' most sacred resource, and always will be. Your Marines are recruited, educated, trained, and retained to win our Nation's battles. They are smart, resilient, fit, disciplined, and able to overcome adversity. Recruiting high quality youth and retaining those whose past service and future potential makes the Corps stronger is our highest priority. Everything we do in the Marine Corps must contribute to their combat readiness and combat effectiveness.

End Strength

Your Marine Corps is in its final year of drawing down active component end strength from a high of 202,000 in 2010 to a steady-state strength of 182,000. We have accomplished this drawdown using primarily the voluntary separation authorities you have granted us. We appreciate the support of Congress, especially this Subcommittee, for those flexibilities. They have been instrumental in enabling us to "keep faith" with our Marines. We have used only a few targeted

involuntary measures and only for individuals who were eligible for early retirement. We do not foresee needing any additional force shaping authorities.

Even though our end strength goals plan for a steady-state 182,000 force, most of the force shaping authorities you have given us will remain relevant and utilized. These measures will continue to help us right-size MOSs, reduce promotion pin-on times, and eliminate grade stagnation.

Marine Corps Reserves

The Marine Corps Reserve is nearing completion of its drawdown. The plan is to reduce reserve end strength to 38,500 Marines by FY17; we foresee no challenges in meeting this FY17 goal. In fact, the Marine Corps Reserve has grown stronger despite the end strength reduction.

Our reserve unit personnel readiness stands at its highest level in a generation. Higher enlisted retention rates have been integral to our success. Retention has increased by 3-percentage points over the past five years -- that equates to approximately 250 more Marines per year. Better retention has helped fix many of our staffing shortages across Marine Forces Reserve. For example, our Staff NCO manning has increased from 66 percent in September 2013 to 82 percent as of January 2016.

While these are welcome and positive trends, we always look for ways to improve personnel readiness. We have implemented a comprehensive manpower management plan to provide full service support to our Reserve officers and Staff NCOs for their career management. Beginning in FY17, we will expand this plan to provide full-service manpower management support for the entire Selected Reserve. This is a talent management initiative that will help our NCOs, Staff NCOs and officers transition between commands and provide our active and reserve units with the “right Marine, at the right place, at the right time.”

Our reserve officer staffing is healthy as well. In fact, it reached a record high of 88 percent in February 2016. This increased staffing has been driven by two major sources: officers transitioning from the Active Component and the Reserve Officer Commissioning Program. Bonuses and incentives have been effective in attracting more Marines from the Active Component. For instance, our Aviator Retention Pay incentive has had a direct and positive impact on our squadron staffing rates, which have increased by 14 percent since 2013. Additionally, the Reserve Officer Commissioning Program has produced a total of 1,107 lieutenants for the Marine Corps since its creation in 2006. As a result, our ground company grade officer strength has increased from 21 percent in 2013, to 90 percent today.

Recruiting

All recruiting efforts for the Marine Corps (officer, enlisted, regular, reserve, and prior-service) fall under the purview of the Marine Corps Recruiting Command. Operationally, this provides us with tremendous flexibility and unity of command, facilitating all efforts to meet accession requirements. The Marine Corps applies, evaluates, and refines proven, time-tested officer and enlisted recruiting policies and procedures that enforce and maintain high mental, moral, and physical standards of our applicants, such as SAT, ACT, and ASVAB testing; pre-enlistment physical screening and fitness tests; and background checks and pre-enlistment screening.

Last fiscal year, we successfully achieved all enlisted and officer recruiting goals for both the Active and Reserve Components, and completed the year with a FY16 start pool of nearly 55 percent.

For FY16, our enlisted mission is 30,500 regulars (active component) and 5,105 reservists. We expect to achieve our annual recruiting ‘shipping’ mission (i.e. new accessions sent to recruit training) and quality goals. The Department of Defense requires 90 percent of enlistees to have a

high school diploma or equivalent; last year, the Marine Corps achieved 99.9 percent and expects to be at or near this level for FY16.

Our officer accession mission for FY16 is 1,500 active duty and 90 Reserve officers. We are well on our way toward these goals and foresee no issues meeting them.

Incentives, such as our enlistment bonuses, allow us to ship new recruits at critical times to balance recruit loads at the depots and meet school seat requirements. It is important to note that only eight percent of new Marine Corps recruits receive an enlistment bonus. We appreciate Congress' support for these priority programs that assist our keeping high quality Marines.

To meet future challenges in the current recruiting environment, it is imperative that we maintain our high standards both for our recruiters and those who volunteer to serve in our Corps. Recruiting quality youth ultimately translates into higher performance, reduced attrition, increased retention, and improved readiness for the operating forces. Our actions, commitment, and investments today in recruiting ensure a high state of readiness in our Corps tomorrow.

Retention

As the Marine Corps draws down to a steady-state 182,000 force, competition for retention will continue. We will retain the very best Marines capable of fulfilling our leadership and operational needs. This is accomplished through a competitive career designation process for officers and a thorough evaluation process for enlisted Marines, both of which are designed to measure, analyze, and compare our Marines' performance and accomplishments.

Marine Corps retention models, systems, policies, and processes emphasize consistency of leadership, personnel stability, and sustained readiness across the force. Officer career designation incorporates a board system that enables leadership to examine officer records and accomplishments. After designation, the promotion process continues the evaluation of Marine officers. It is a primary tool by which retention of only the best and most qualified is achieved.

Tiered rating system for enlisted Marines takes into account a number of quantifiable performance factors and includes both immediate and higher leadership input. It helps to set achievable goals for Marines as they compete for retention. After initial reenlistment, the evaluation and continued retention of high quality enlisted Marines is supported by a detailed and continual performance evaluation system which is fully integrated with the promotion process. Those Marines with the best proven records are promoted and retained.

Incentive pays remain critical to our retention effort, allowing the Marine Corps to fill hard to recruit positions, such as cyber security technicians and counter intelligence specialists. Similarly, Selective Reenlistment Bonuses (SRBs) allow us to shape our career force. SRBs target critical MOSs and supports lateral movement of Marines to these MOSs.

Marine Corps Integration

As our Commandant recently testified, executing a successful gender integration plan will be a key to sustaining readiness, as well as ensuring we give all Marines the greatest opportunity to succeed as valued members of the Corps. The issue of gender integration is not about “women in combat,” since women in our Corps have clearly demonstrated their outstanding service in combat, most recently in Iraq and Afghanistan. Our current efforts are about placing the best and most fully qualified Marines where they can succeed and make the strongest contribution to the missions the Marine Corps executes as the Nation’s expeditionary force-in-readiness.

During the last two years, the Marine Corps undertook a comprehensive research effort to better understand the impacts of gender integration on combat effectiveness and health of the force. Our research analyzed the performance of individual Marines in our formal MOS-producing ground combat arms courses. As a result, we developed, refined, and implemented improved occupation-specific physical standards and the associated screening tools for obtaining these MOSs.

But the individual is only one aspect. The Marine Corps fights in teams – as units – in an arena where strength and speed win and second place is truly an unforgiving prize. Therefore, we studied both gender integrated and non-integrated units, operating as squads, teams, and crews; and we did this under live-fire conditions that most closely replicate actual ground combat conditions. This is the first time this level of research has been conducted. Our study was peer-reviewed by three well-respected, independent organizations to ensure diversity and depth of feedback regarding the research methodology. The female volunteers for this study were quality Marines in every respect; physically, they were well above the average female Marine in the fleet. The most significant findings were the large disparity in performance during movement under load – both marching and firing weapons.

Currently, the Marine Corps is stepping out smartly to facilitate the integration of all qualified Marines into previously closed ground combat MOSs and units. Integration will be executed in a well-planned and responsible manner. The framework of our research was – and continues to be – viewed through three interrelated lenses: first and foremost, the combat effectiveness of our Marine units; second, the health and welfare of our individual Marines; and finally, with an eye toward the best talent management of our total force – both today and into the future. I continue to have concerns in all three areas, but am confident that our assessment and subsequent adjustments during implementation will help us find the best way forward. Our readiness and combat effectiveness will remain the guiding focus as we implement our plan.

Civilian Marines

Our Civilian Marines support the mission and daily functions of the Marine Corps and are an integral part of our Total Force. They exemplify our core values; they embrace esprit de corps, teamwork, and pride in belonging to our Nation's Corps of Marines. Serving alongside our Marines throughout the world, in every occupation and at every level, our civilian appropriated funded

workforce remains by far the leanest of all services, with a ratio of one civilian to every ten active duty Marines.

Approximately 95 percent of our civilians do not work in the Washington, DC, region. The vast majority reside at our bases, stations, depots, and installations. Sixty-eight percent are veterans who have chosen to continue to serve our Nation; of those, thirteen percent are disabled veterans. Our civilian non-appropriated funded workforce steadfastly continues to provide vital support to our Marines, reserve Marines, their families, and our wounded, ill and injured.

Already lean, we are in the midst of reducing our 17,500 Civilian Marine appropriated fund workforce to 15,800 by FY17, and are working to implement the Management Headquarters Activities provision in the FY16 NDAA. We are actively seeking ways to achieve these goals through attrition and various voluntary workforce-shaping flexibilities; our intent is not to implement any service-wide reduction in force (RIF).

The last few years have not been easy on our Civilian Marines, with limited pay raises and furloughs or threat of furloughs several times. Throughout all of this uncertainty, our civilians have truly showed themselves as Semper Fidelis as they kept our Marines and their families in the forefront. For that, they have my personal admiration. During these challenging times, it is imperative that we continue to keep faith with our workforce, else we risk losing enormously talented and dedicated professionals. Our civilian labor represents less than five percent of the Marine Corps' total O&M budget, demonstrating that our "best value" for the defense dollar applies to our civilians as well as our Marines.

Force of the Future Initiative

The Marine Corps is in the midst of the Department of Defense Force of the Future Initiative. The initiative touches on nearly all aspects of military and civilian personnel systems. In many cases, the changes driven by this initiative codifies what has been existing service practices. In all

cases, we continue to advocate for service flexibility which enables the Marine Corps to enhance our human resource processes without impacting our ability to execute Title 10 responsibilities.

TAKING CARE OF MARINES AND THEIR FAMILIES

Taking care of Marines and their families is a key element of overall readiness and combat effectiveness. The adage “we recruit Marines, we retain families” remains as true today as ever. Our comprehensive package of services seeks the holistic fitness and readiness of our Marines and families – body, mind, spirit, and social.

Casualty Assistance

The most solemn care we can provide to our Marine families is to care for our fallen Marines and assist families at every step. We strive to do just that. Despite the drawdown from combat operations, casualties are still occurring daily. Even while not in a combat theater, the mass casualty incidents in Nepal, the Chattanooga shooting, and training incidents in Florida and Hawaii prove over and over again that being our Nation’s expeditionary force in readiness has its share of risks.

Our casualty assistance program is committed to ensuring the families of our fallen are always treated with the utmost compassion, dignity, and honor. Our uniformed Casualty Assistance Calls Officers (CACO) make in-person notifications to the Next-Of-Kin (NOK), often with a Chaplain, for all deceased Marines; telephone notifications are made for the wounded, ill, and injured. When warranted, family members may travel to bedside via Invitational Travel Orders. Following notification, CACOs assist the NOK with burial arrangements, applications for benefits and entitlements, contact with benevolent and philanthropic organizations, obtaining reports of investigation, and other pertinent issues.

The Marine Corps Long Term Assistance Program (LTAP) is a permanent resource of the NOK, ensuring they receive sustained, quality assistance from the Marine Corps. This includes

NOK being contacted from a representative from LTAP approximately 60 days and at one year mark following the death to identify and resolve any persistent issues and to assist and attend to the needs of Marine Corps Survivors indefinitely. LTAP representatives also routinely attend quarterly DoD/VA Survivor Forums and TAPS National Survivor and Good Grief Camps.

Wounded Warrior Care

The Marine Corps' Wounded Warrior Regiment (WWR) continues to function as a central pillar of our pledge to "keep faith" with those who have served. The WWR will be an enduring need because Marines supporting operations in or near combat zones will continue to need care management; instances of PTS and TBI continue to increase due to delayed onset and as Marines often delay seeking help; and severe non-combat illnesses, such as cancer, do not end with combat.

Our WWR remains committed to providing comprehensive recovery care. For the Marine Corps, recovery care is not a process. Care coordinated through the WWR is soundly based upon an authentic relationship between care providers and the Marine and his or her family members. This bond allows all parties to be vested in a common purpose: to provide our Nation's wounded, ill and injured (WII) Marines the care and support needed for successful recovery and to ensure they and their families transition to meaningful, productive new roles.

Since our WWR was established in 2007, thousands of WII Marines and family members have benefitted from its care coordination capabilities. These capabilities include Recovery Care Coordinators to help WII Marines develop and execute Comprehensive Recovery Plans, District Injured Support Coordinators, the Marine Corps' representatives for WII Marines in their civilian communities, who can be at a WII Marines doorstep in a matter of hours, a liaison to the Department of Veterans Affairs to enhance coordination between the organizations, and the Sergeant Merlin German Wounded Warrior Call Center to conduct outreach to WII Marines and receive calls for assistance. Our call center conducts an average of 10,500 outreach calls per month

and receives an average of 1,100 incoming calls for assistance per month. The call center can also connect a Marine directly to a medical professional who may direct or advocate for behavioral health/medical care.

In sum, WWII Marines and their family members receive customized, caring support, based upon their assessed needs, from the point of injury or illness, through rehabilitation, and finally as they return to duty or reintegrate to their hometowns. The Marine Corps does not utilize a “fire and forget” mentality. Marines and their families, the Congress, and the public at large can be reassured that the Marine Corps, through the WWR, will continue recovery care in times of war and in peacetime.

Behavioral Health

The Marine Corps Behavioral Health Program acts as an integrated community based service model focused on the prevention and intervention of suicide, substance abuse, combat operational stress, and family advocacy. When addressing behavioral health care, we typically see Marines, family members, and others, with multiple stressors or conditions. Even as the Marine Corps moves into a post OIF/OEF environment, continued support ensures the readiness of our Marines and their families, especially for those with delayed onset of symptoms.

Because behavioral health issues are complex and contain many common stressors and factors, the Marine Corps has incorporated a holistic view of prevention. For example, the Marine Corps introduced “*Protect What You’ve Earned*” which reinforces the Marine Corps culture of leadership through personal action and accountability. Through it, we seek to reduce high-risk decision-making thereby reducing sexual assault, domestic violence, suicide, alcohol and other substance misuse-related incidents.

To support our Marines, attached Sailors, and families, the Marine Corps offer world-class prevention and counseling services at each installation. All behavioral health programs provide free

confidential services offered by licensed, credentialed professionals. Professionals conduct comprehensive assessments and individually-tailor counseling sessions to address substance abuse, relationship difficulties, domestic violence, child neglect and other stress related concerns before more serious conditions develop. These services are available to individuals, couples, families and children.

Suicide Prevention

One of the highest priorities of our behavioral health program is suicide prevention. Preventing suicide has proven to be a very challenging task given the complex nature of the problem. We are constantly evolving and assessing our programs to coincide with best practices.

A main focus of our suicide prevention efforts is the Marine Intercept Program (MIP). It is a combined effort between HQMC, installation Community Counseling Programs, and commanders. MIP provides care coordination, regular telephone check-ins and suicide assessment for Marines with a reported suicidal ideation or suicide attempt. MIP is a “super safety net” for Marines identified at increased risk for suicide. Services include continuous assessment and safety planning as well as a series of caring contacts for a minimum of 90 days.

In 2015, 1,247 reports of suicide ideations or attempts were reported and assigned to MIP. Of the total Marines offered MIP, 77 percent accepted services. Based on a preliminary review of early MIP data in 2014, Marines receiving MIP services accessed care 2.5 times sooner, miss fewer appointments and engaged specialty care more often.

The Marine Corps *DSTRESS* line provides anonymous, 24/7/365 phone, chat and Skype support with a duty to warn if danger is imminent. Since its inception in 2010, *DSTRESS* has helped save 36 lives; it also helps to increase the total fitness of our Marine Corps families by providing live support for effectively coping with the wide spectrum of challenges of life in the Corps. Marines

contact DSTRESS for varying reasons including relationship issues, stress management, post-traumatic stress, depression-suicidal ideation, and sexual assault.

In order to leverage the power of social media, the Marine Corps recently launched a marketing awareness campaign addressing suicide prevention. The main message is to highlight the trend of individuals expressing suicidal thoughts on social media and detail what steps to take if someone is in emotional distress. The social media posts highlight the DSTRESS Line, and instruct individuals to use Facebook's Suicide Prevention Tool to report concerns. To date, almost 300,000 individuals viewed and shared these posts, resulting in an 800 percent increase in traffic to the DSTRESS website in a 2 day period beginning on 12 January 2016. More such social media posts are being planned.

One of the newer initiatives we are introducing is Conquering Stress with Strength. It is a workshop that focuses on family members under stress. This is the first available, family-focused training to develop family skills for appropriately responding to high-stress situations.

Sexual Assault Prevention & Response

We will not be satisfied until sexual assault is eliminated in the Marine Corps. We are encouraged by FY14 survey data indicating a 30 percent decrease in the prevalence of unwanted sexual contact since FY12. In that same time period, there was a 94 percent increase in the number of victims coming forward to report. While the next prevalence survey will not be fielded until the end of FY16, preliminary FY15 data show that we have sustained our levels of reporting. In addition, from FY14 to FY15, we saw an increase in the number of victims filing unrestricted reports, which demonstrates increased confidence in our response system and in commander support. Another positive trend is that more victims of sexual assault are reporting the crime within three days of the incident, placing the Marine Corps in a better position to hold offenders appropriately accountable by facilitating more timely investigations.

Male victims are an extremely underreported population. The Marine Corps is developing a more in-depth knowledge of the factors that influence the reporting decision among male Marines who experience sexual assault. We are integrating specific information on male victims in our prevention education and training. Significantly, we have posted five products addressing male victimization on official Marine Corps social media pages, reaching a combined total of more than one million people. SAPR is also hosting a subject matter expert panel on male victims of sexual assault in April 2016 to inform our prevention practices and program development. From FY14 to FY15, the number of male victims filing reports increased slightly, a positive indication for this population that has been reluctant to report.

The Marine Corps takes allegations and acts of retaliation very seriously. Retaliatory behavior - whether on duty, on liberty, or online - is unconscionable and should never be tolerated. We are taking a number of actions to address this problem. For example, our Sexual Assault Response Coordinators and SAPR Victim Advocates are trained to ask victims about experiences of retaliation during their monthly safety check-ins. In addition, our case management group chairs are required to assess all reports of retaliation in their monthly meetings, ensuring that they are properly referred for resolution. We have also posted social media products that specifically address retaliation which have reached more than 341,000 people. In addition, steps are underway to integrate retaliation into SAPR training products for all Marines. The message is clear: If a Marine reports misconduct or a crime like sexual assault, they deserve – as a fellow Marine – to be treated with dignity and respect.

Transition Readiness

As the Marine Corps has reduced its end strength over the last few years, more of our Marines and their families have made the transition to civilian life. It is imperative that we ensure

they have the right preparation to reach personal goals and effectively translate their military experiences to a successful civilian life.

Our Marine For Life Cycle is a holistic process, not an event. Beginning at the point of recruiting, the Marine Corps strives to provide a continuum of tangible learning or experienced-based opportunities to ensure that every Marine is transition-ready throughout their career.

At their first permanent duty station, Marines complete the personal readiness seminar. It provides an overview of personal and professional development services, such as family member employment, voluntary education, personal financial management, and service members' rights.

Approximately a year prior to separation, Marines complete our transition readiness seminar. It is a week-long program that includes mandatory standardized core curriculum followed by the choice of one of three additional two-day tracks that are in line with their individual future goals and objectives – higher education, career and technical training, or entrepreneurship.

No later than 90 days prior separation, Marines will meet with their commanding officer for Capstone review. At this time, the commanding officer will validate whether the Marine has met their career readiness standards. If a Marine does not meet their career readiness standards or have a viable transition plan, we provide a warm handover to Department of Labor or Veteran Affairs partner agencies for additional post-transition assistance.

After separation, our nationwide network of Marine For Life representatives reach back to provide support to Marines. In order to build a robust virtual community, we are currently expanding our network to include an online presence on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. Our goal is to have an online community and network of Marines and friends of Marines to help transitioning Marines identify opportunities in the civilian marketplace.

One way to ensure that Marines will be successful in transitioning is to ensure that their military skills and work experience can be transferred into a civilian job. The 2014 National

Defense Authorization Act charged the Services to make credentialing information available to all members upon their initial training and at every stage of training in their MOSs. The Marine Corps Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL) is part of that initiative. It links Marines with certifications and licenses related to their Military Occupational Specialties across the continuum of the Marine For Life Cycle.

COOL is an open public website that is available and accessible to those currently serving, veterans, spouses, potential employers across all industries, enterprises, credentialing agencies, and associations. A credential translates Marine Corps technical skills into marketable language recognized by employers and may make the post service job search easier. Marines are able to choose from 943 certifications depending on their MOS or by the name of a specific credential or agency. Marines can also find general information on a myriad of resources to support their personal and professional development plans.

As of July 2015, the Marine Corps is paying for examination fees and annual maintenance for enlisted Marines to earn civilian/industry credentials, which are closely aligned with the Marine's MOS.

Marine Corps Exchange Services

The Marine Corps delivers a myriad quality of life programs via an integrated Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS) construct that combines Morale, Welfare and Recreation; Marine Corps Exchange (MCX); Warfighter and Family Services; and Child Development Programs. This integrated model is unique within DoD and provides many operating efficiencies, including consolidated non-appropriated fund back-office support, e.g. human resources, finance and accounting, procurement, construction and information technology.

Our MCX is an integral business component of MCCS delivering products and services in garrison and expeditionary environments. Marines and families can count on real savings when

they shop at the MCX; the most recent market basket survey showed an average savings of over 24 percent, while maintaining a consistent gross margin. The military resale system is one of the largest employers of military family members, about 30 percent of the Marine Corps Exchange workforce is a veteran or a military family member. The MCX revenue contributions to MCCA remain an essential and mission critical asset to the Marine Corps.

Transformation and innovation is the fabric of MCCA as we continue to investigate new program and service delivery models by leveraging technology, partnerships, and sponsorships. The Marine Corps is also an active participant in the newly established Defense Resale Business Optimization Board chartered to seek efficiencies, while preserving the valued quality of life benefits provided by both commissaries and exchanges.

CONCLUSION

The Marines of our Corps represent the American people who have stepped forward and sworn to defend and protect our Nation. Through recruiting, training, education, and retention of men and women of character who take up our challenge to become one of “the Few and the Proud,” we will enhance the quality of our Corps and our overall combat effectiveness. By ensuring that we take care of all Marines and their families, we fulfill our responsibility to keep faith with the honor, courage, and commitment they have so freely given.

Our individual Marines are our most precious asset. They are proud of what they do. They are proud of the “Eagle, Globe, and Anchor” and what it represents to our Nation. With your support, a vibrant Marine Corps will continue to meet our Nation’s call.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.