

Not for publication until released by the Committee

PREPARED STATEMENT

OF

**THE HONORABLE GILBERT R. CISNEROS, JR.
UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL & READINESS**

**THE HONORABLE LESTER MARTINEZ LOPEZ
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR HEALTH AFFAIRS**

**THE HONORABLE SHAWN SKELLY
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR READINESS**

**MR. THOMAS CONSTABLE
ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR MANPOWER & RESERVE
AFFAIRS**

**MS. BETH FOSTER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF FORCE RESILIENCY**

REGARDING

FISCAL YEAR 2024 DEFENSE PERSONNEL POSTURE

BEFORE THE

SENATE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL

MARCH 15, 2023

Not for publication until released by the Committee

Chairwoman Warren, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the Personnel Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you, along with the other leaders of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness (OUSDP&R)), to discuss the Department of Defense's greatest strength and achievement – our people. We are proud to represent the 2.3 million Active and Reserve Component Service members and over 900,000 DoD civilians who defend our nation every day, and the families, caregivers, and survivors who serve alongside them. And 2023 is a very significant year for the Department of Defense as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of President Truman's order to racially desegregate and Congressional action to allow women to serve in the Armed Forces as well as the 50th anniversary of the All-Volunteer Force. These significant events were directly responsible for creating the most unrivaled fighting force in history.

In order for us to succeed in an ever changing landscape of threats and challenges, both international and domestic, Secretary Austin laid out three priorities for the Department – Defend the Nation, Take Care of Our People, and Succeed Through Teamwork. Understanding that our people are at the core of Secretary Austin's priorities, P&R established four overarching priorities that are foundational to P&R's efforts: Change the Culture; Promote the Health, Well-being, and Safety of the Force and Families; Cultivate Talent Management; and Advance Strategic Readiness.

CHANGE THE CULTURE

Trust in the military is crucial to preserving the legacy and effectiveness of our All-Volunteer Force. In order to gain the trust of Service members, their families, civilian employees, and the public, the Department focuses on supporting our forces' ability to accomplish their mission by decreasing the prevalence of sexual assault, sexual harassment and other destructive behavior, inculcating diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) principles across all Department efforts, and ensuring Service members and families, and civilian employees are protected against bias and discrimination. Addressing these issues is critical to our values, maintaining cohesive and strong units, and ensuring our overall military readiness and leadership on the global stage.

Countering Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

Sexual assault and sexual harassment are not only a threat to our readiness, but contrary to everything we stand for. It has a devastating impact on the whole military community and erodes the trust of our All-Volunteer Force. In order to bring about change, the Department is making significant investments to properly and effectively counter sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military.

Secretary Austin made countering sexual assault a priority on his first day on the job as it is one of the most challenging issues we face. The entire Department continues to work collaboratively – across Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) Components, Military Departments, and the National Guard Bureau to operationalize the Secretary’s implementation guidance for recommendations from the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military (IRC).

We are making progress towards implementation of all approved IRC recommendations. This past year, we began implementing the most significant changes to the military justice system in decades when the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and the Department of the Air Force achieved initial operational capability in standing up their respective Offices of Special Trial Counsel (OSTC). Each OSTC is led by a Senate-confirmed one-star Lead Special Trial Counsel supervised directly by the Military Department’s Secretary, without intervening authority. The OSTCs are on track to reach full operational capability by December 2023. These changes place prosecution decisions for sexual assault, domestic violence, and other named offenses in the hands of trained, experienced, and independent military attorneys who report outside the command structure, and only to the civilian Secretaries of the Military Departments. Implementation also includes building a career track for military justice for judge advocates in each of the Services, to enable the development of a sustained cadre of these specialized prosecutors across the Force. In 2025, these Special Trial Counsel will importantly also assume jurisdiction over sexual harassment.

We are also making progress in fielding a new full-time and specialized prevention workforce to avert these crimes before they occur. We have established guidance and infrastructure, and hiring for the 2,000-plus workforce continues, prioritizing on the highest risk locations and positions that will establish policy and processes for the workforce. Additionally,

Not for publication until released by the Committee

we have trained 1,200 collateral-duty prevention personnel. The Department is also working to professionalize the sexual assault response workforce to provide them with enhanced skills and the independence required to better assist victim recovery. We are revising policy and training to provide Sexual Assault Response Coordinators and Sexual Assault Prevention Response Victim Advocates with greater independence and expertise to foster support and provide victim care. We are also working to identify supportive services and victim advocacy for victims of sexual harassment, as the IRC also recommended, recognizing the corrosive impacts of sexual harassment on unit climate, cohesion and morale in addition to the harms experienced by individual victims, including the significant increased risk for sexual assault within units that have high rates of sexual harassment. Further, we are working to strengthen accountability, prevention and victim support for cyberharassment across the force.

We continue to use On-Site Installation Evaluations (OSIEs) to support leaders in improving their command climate through data-driven changes that help eliminate harmful behaviors in the military, protect our people, and support readiness. Locations for the 2023 OSIEs were selected using a multi-pronged risk index, including data from the Defense Organizational Climate Survey and other data involving risk for harmful behaviors. OSIEs expand the Department's efforts on integrated prevention of harmful behaviors and heighten the visibility of risk and protective factors impacting our installations and improve our chances of detecting and correcting harmful behaviors before tragic incidents occur.

Although we are making progress with the IRC recommendations, we know there is still much work to be done. We believe our efforts will restore the trust and faith of people, assist victims with recovery, and hold offenders appropriately accountable. We owe nothing less to our Service members. We thank Congress for authorizing and appropriating the full amount of the Department's Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 request in support of the IRC recommendations. Your support of the FY24 DoD budget request would ensure we have the continued resources to aggressively combat this issue, and complete the historic changes to reform military justice, field the specialized prevention workforce, train and equip response personnel, and empower survivors. These efforts not only reflect our values, but they have a direct impact on ensuring the unit cohesion necessary for success on the battlefield.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

Our diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) efforts recognize that even one instance of inappropriate discrimination or other problematic behaviors can destroy unit cohesion and trust, which are necessary for the good order and discipline that underpins our Armed Forces and our ability to deter and defeat adversaries. Additionally, our approach to DEIA recognizes that we must do more to draw upon the varied backgrounds, skills, talents, and unique strengths from all members of our Total Force. Taking these actions helps support all of our people, and ensures we maintain our readiness and unique strategic advantages as a diverse nation.

Enhancing DEIA across our Department also maximizes our ability to recruit and retain top talent, and DoD strives to ensure that the wide-ranging benefits of DEIA also helps drive every aspect of our approach to talent management. Inculcating DEIA principles ensures we are leveraging the strengths of all our people, advancing opportunity, addressing potential barriers and discrepancies, and fundamentally ensuring people are treated with dignity and respect – all of which directly enhance our ability to accomplish the Department’s mission to provide the military forces needed to deter war and ensure the nation’s security.

DoD continues to take steps to improve and increase DEIA, and the Department is working to further understand root causes in areas where we lack diversity, develop initiatives that have measurable outcome metrics, maintain appropriate data to inform and target efforts, ensure environments are inclusive of all who serve, and foster a strong governance structure to oversee these efforts.

This past year, the Department published its 2022 – 2023 DEIA Strategic Plan. To advance progress on DEIA issues, we continue to aggressively address a broad range of topics, including the need for additional efforts to more fully capitalize on the significant benefits that DEIA brings to the Department’s mission. With partners across the Department, we continue to address efforts to increase diversity within talent pathways; expand DEIA data collection, analysis, and management; and integrate diversity and inclusion curriculum into leadership development training.

The DoD is focused on creating long-term changes by supporting racial, ethnic, and gender diversity and inclusion in the military – as well as diversity and inclusion for varied backgrounds, strengths, skills, and talents – and eliminating any causal factors that prevent

Not for publication until released by the Committee

diversity or lead to discriminatory practices. We are taking steps to ensure our Service members and DoD civilian employees have opportunities to achieve their professional goals based on merit, remove any barriers that prevent equal opportunity, and ensure a cohesive and ready force that reflects the diversity of our Nation. Doing so will help the Department attract and retain the best talent for our wide-ranging needs, while supporting strong and resilient teams.

Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) Program

Proper oversight of the operation, administration, and effectiveness of the overall JROTC program is paramount as a program to highlight the importance and merits of public service, and bridge the ever widening civil-military divide in our country. Following allegations of JROTC instructor misconduct, P&R has taken action to address concerns. P&R issued a memorandum to the Military Departments on March 10, detailing the continued collaboration in developing and codifying policy to ensure we have effective oversight and administration of the JROTC program. P&R is working on an expedited Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) that will direct the Military Departments to implement seven policy directives: 1) Standardize background investigations – Tier 1 with Child Care Investigation for Non-Sensitive Positions; 2) Achieve a maximum headquarter to school oversight ratio of 1:30; 3) Standardize Memorandums of Agreement; 4) Implement JROTC Instructor Prohibited Activities Acknowledgement; 5) Implement Student and Instructor Responsibilities Acknowledgement; 6) Title IX Compliance Course for all JROTC instructors; and 7) Notification of Allegations Against a JROTC Instructor.

The FY24 Defense Budget requests \$12.98 million to support increased oversight and evaluation of the operation, administration, and effectiveness of the overall JROTC program. Congress' support for these funds would allow the Department to achieve a 1:30 oversight ratio, directly support annual, in-person program evaluations, and expand the capacity for processing Tier 1 with Child Care Investigation for Non-Sensitive Positions which would contribute to the safety of all program participants.

PROMOTE THE HEALTH, WELL-BEING, AND SAFETY OF THE FORCE AND FAMILIES

Our people are the foundation of our military readiness and national security and it is not just the Service members who serve, but their entire family. Current events—recovery from a

Not for publication until released by the Committee

global pandemic, economic pressures such as inflation, declining trust in institutions, and two decades of accelerated operational tempo—make it more important than ever to focus the Department’s policies and resources on taking care of our people.

Safety and Occupational Health

To preserve our enduring advantages, we must ensure the safety and health of our greatest asset, the Department’s military and civilian personnel, and protect our resources and capabilities. We are elevating safety governance through the Department’s senior safety governance forum, the Defense Safety Oversight Council (DSOC), as well as the congressionally-mandated, operationally-focused Joint Safety Council. We are undergoing a Department-wide effort to establish, implement, validate, and analyze consistent safety data collection standards and processes, based on the 2020 National Commission on Military Aviation Safety recommendations. Standardized safety data will be integrated and analyzed with readiness, training, maintenance, medical, and other information to identify risk mitigations and support resource decisions. Our governance guides DoD-wide cross-cutting efforts to achieve and promote a safety culture, reduce mishaps, manage safety hazards, and ensure actionable enterprise safety data is accessible to support DoD’s business processes for managing safety and minimizing risk in the workplace.

Economic Security

Ensuring that we are appropriately compensating our workforce and increasing the overall economic security of Service members and military families is integral to the competition for talent that supports mission readiness. While we believe the current military compensation package is fair, in order to remain competitive, we must keep pace with private-sector wage growth and inflation to ensure we can recruit and retain the force we need. Due to Congress’ support, on January 1, 2023, Service members and civilian employees received a 4.6% basic pay raise, the largest since 2003. This was coupled with an average 12.1% increase in the basic allowance for housing and an 11.2% increase in the basic allowance for subsistence. The President’s Fiscal Year 2024 Budget request provides a 5.2% pay raise for military and civilian personnel in Calendar Year 2024 assuring fair and equitable compensation needed for recruitment and retention of skilled talent. These have been impactful increases, we recognize

Not for publication until released by the Committee

there is still work to be done and will continue to implement change as we evaluate the effectiveness of these increases.

Food insecurity is also a complex issue that requires collaboration across the Department, as well as with other Federal agencies, community partners, and military service organizations. Through a coordinated effort, the DoD is working to ensure military families have the resources, support, and knowledge necessary to address and avoid food insecurity, especially when they are most vulnerable. In addition to executing the Department's *Strengthening Food Security in the Force: Strategy and Roadmap*, the DoD also implemented a Basic Needs Allowance in January 2023 to ensure Service members' household income is at least 130 percent of the federal poverty guideline. The FY23 NDAA increases this level from 130 percent to 150 percent by January 2024.

These increases in pay and allowances will have a real, positive impact on the economic well-being of the Force and our families. The 14th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (QRMC) has begun its work, and we look forward to reviewing its progress. As directed by President Biden, the QRMC will thoroughly look at the military compensation system and how it can ensure economic security and better attract and retain Service members and their families, including through a first-ever review of childcare access and cost, and consideration of additional factors such as the challenge of military spouse unemployment, frequent military moves, periods of geographic separation between service members and their spouses (including dual military couples).

Taking Care of Our People

To advance Taking Care of People as one of his three priorities, Secretary Austin issued a memorandum on November 17, 2021, "Strengthening Economic Security in the Force," which directed 12 specific initiatives in three categories: Provide Immediate Relief; Increase Stability for Service Members and Families; and Expand Financial Readiness Resources. Less than one year later, on September 22, 2022, the Secretary issued a second memorandum: "Taking Care of Our Service Members and Families." It directed 13 specific initiatives in four categories: Securing Affordable Basic Needs; Making Moves Easier; Further Strengthening our Support to Families; and Expanding Spousal Employment. These initiatives took measurable action to tackle pressing problems facing Service members and their families such as economic pain

Not for publication until released by the Committee

occasioned by this inflationary period, a persistent unemployment rate of 21% for military spouses, difficulty finding child care, and mitigating the hardships military families face due to frequent moves. Moving forward, the Department will leverage previous actions and continue to aggressively pursue programs and initiatives to make sure we are taking care of our people.

Military Spouse Employment

No spouse should be forced to choose between supporting their Service member and pursuing their own meaningful career. On January 5, 2023, the President signed into law Congress' amendment to the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to require portability of most professional licenses for Service members and their spouses. This law is intended to ease the ability of military spouses to find meaningful employment as they advance their careers while relocating alongside their service member. The Defense State Liaison Office will continue its work with state legislators in all 50 states to improve and enhance state laws governing occupational license portability and reciprocity to reduce barriers to portable, sustainable careers.

The Department also continues to increase employment opportunities through the broadening of the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), with a focus on critical employment sectors such as information technology, education, and small businesses. This past October, the MSEP welcomed 70 new employer partners, bringing the total number of MSEP partners to more than 600. Since its inception in 2011, the MSEP employer partners have hired more than 250,000 spouses.

The Department has also launched a 12-week paid fellowship program to expand employment opportunities for eligible military spouses and connect employers with a diverse, highly skilled, and educated workforce. The Military Spouse Career Accelerator Pilot (MSCAP) program provides spouses of currently serving members of the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Space Force, to include active, reserve and National Guard components, with paid fellowships at civilian employers across various industries and locations. This is being done in partnership with best-in-class non-profit programming that has a proven record of military spouse employment and empowerment.

Not for publication until released by the Committee

Understanding that military spouses are usually transitory based on their Service member's duty location, we are addressing the ongoing challenge of ensuring they are aware of available resources and support to assist them. Ensuring awareness and increasing utilization of resources across the force, and across the spectrum of service, is crucial to retaining our Service members and their families.

Military Parental Leave Program

At the beginning of this year, the Department published its expanded parental leave policy that builds on the Department's support of military families by streamlining and enhancing leave for Service members who become parents of a new child. The FY22 NDAA expanded parental leave to 12 weeks for eligible birth and non-birth parents. This includes adoptive parents and foster parents in cases of long-term foster placements. For birth mothers, the 12 weeks of parental leave is in addition to and following authorized medical convalescent leave necessary to recover from childbirth. The expanded parental leave policy is competitive with the parental leave offered by Federal agencies and other leading employers. By strengthening military families, we strengthen our force and our nation.

Child Care

Child care is a workforce enabler and a critical component of the readiness, efficiency, and retention of the Total Force. Affordable, quality child care continues to be a challenge facing many DoD families and the nation in general. Child care is among the lowest paid occupations in the nation, and child care professionals with a similar education earn less than those working in different fields, which contributes to the persistent challenge of recruiting and retaining the workforce needed to meet the child care needs of our families.

To best support the child care needs of our Service members and civilian workforce, the Department will continue to work in collaboration with the Military Services on the development and implementation of initiatives aimed at improving child care availability, addressing child care staffing challenges, and expanding access to community-based fee assistance programs.

In October 2022, the Department increased the fee assistance provider rate cap from \$1,500 to \$1,700 per child, per month, providing more fee assistance to families. The DoD will also continue its pilot program of providing Service members financial assistance to offset the

Not for publication until released by the Committee

cost of in-home child care, and expand The Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood PLUS program which utilizes the States Quality Rating and Improvement Systems as an indicator of provider quality, in lieu of national accreditation, broadening the pool of providers eligible to receive fee assistance on behalf of military families. The Department is in the process of establishing a pilot program to contract non-profit child development centers in areas of high cost, low availability, and high need through non-profit organizations.

We have expanded Military OneSource offerings for no-cost access to a web-based subscription service of providers offering child care services. The DoD has also established a DoD Child Care Compensation Task Force that is currently conducting a bottom-up review of child care compensation, recruitment, and retention.

Addressing child care access is another critical element to building an enduring advantage, and the right thing to do to take care of our people.

Commissaries

Access to grocery products worldwide remains a top-priority of the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA). Understanding that Defense Commissaries are DoD's first line of defense for families in need, we were able to achieve an average of 23% savings at our Commissaries by the end of FY22, even with historic inflation. More recently, in the last quarter, those savings increased to 25.3%, exceeding the goal set out by Secretary Austin. Additionally, online shopping is available at all commissaries. DeCA's primary purpose is to provide a benefit that enhances quality of life and readiness for military Service members, their families, retirees, Medal of Honor recipients, their authorized family members, all veterans with a service-connected disability, and individuals approved and designated as the primary family caregivers of eligible Veterans.

Reproductive Health Care

In the wake of the *Dobbs* Supreme Court decision last spring, it is estimated that 40% of active duty Servicewomen have no or severely restricted access to abortion services where they are stationed. Additionally, 39% of the U.S. population has no or limited nearby access to Assisted Reproductive Technology services such as invitro fertilization or IVF. The Department has heard directly from our Service members who have expressed their concerns about access to

Not for publication until released by the Committee

reproductive health care for themselves and their family members, and the impacts on readiness, retention and recruitment were verified by independent experts.

In October 2022, Secretary Austin issued his “Ensuring Access to Reproductive Health” memorandum to ensure that Service members and their dependents can access the non-covered reproductive health care they need, regardless of where they are stationed. On February 16, the Department published three important new policies to help Service members access essential reproductive health care, and on February 27, the Military Departments published guidance to implement the policies.

The first policy establishes a standard timeline for command notification of pregnancy. Under this new policy, Service members are allowed up to 20 weeks of gestation to notify their commanders of pregnancy with a few exceptions. This policy is intended to allow the Service member time to make private, personal health care and family decisions while accounting for commanders’ responsibilities to meet operational requirements and protect the wellbeing of Service members in their command. The policy includes limited exceptions for requiring notification before 20 weeks such as specific military duties, occupational health hazards, and medical conditions. Service members are also encouraged to access prenatal care as soon as they learn of their pregnancy to promote the health and wellbeing of themselves and their pregnancy. When a Service member chooses to delay command notification, a DoD health care provider will place the pregnant Service member in a medical temporary non-deployable status and limited-duty or light-duty status without reference to the Service member’s pregnancy status.

The second policy allows for administrative absence for non-covered reproductive health care. Military medical providers may perform—and TRICARE pays for—abortions in limited circumstances: when the life of the mother would be endangered if the fetus is carried to term, or when the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. Other abortions are not covered and are paid for by the individual. Also, except in very limited circumstances, TRICARE does not pay for Assisted Reproductive Technology. In limited circumstances, severely ill or injured Service members may receive Assisted Reproductive Technology through the Supplemental Health Care Program, however, most beneficiaries seeking such services do so at their own expense.

The new policy grants Service members an administrative absence, with approval, from their normal duty station to access non-covered reproductive health care, including non-covered

Not for publication until released by the Committee

abortion and Assisted Reproductive Technology, without loss of pay or being charged leave. Service members may also be granted an administrative absence to accompany a dual-military spouse or dependent to access non-covered reproductive health care.

The third policy authorizes travel allowances for non-covered reproductive health care when timely access to such care is not available within the local area of the duty station. These are standard allowances under the Department of Defense Joint Travel Regulation. Travel allowances—which include transportation, lodging, and meals—will be available for Service members or an eligible dependent, and for an attendant or escort if the individual is not capable of traveling alone. As before, the non-covered reproductive health care procedure itself is at the expense of the patient.

In addition to these policies, the Department standardized walk-in contraception services at military medical treatment facilities to promote easy, timely access to care, and support the family planning goals of Service members and their families. One hundred and thirty facilities now offer same-day access to comprehensive contraceptive counseling, including the full scope of non-surgical contraceptive methods, without a need for a referral or appointment.

Nothing is more important than taking care of our people, and these policies are necessary to ensure the health and well-being of our force and families, and create a diverse and inclusive force. Beyond being the right thing to do, the policies promote recruitment and retention of Service members when our personnel and their families may have serious concerns about whether they will effectively lose access to reproductive health services if they are required to move to a jurisdiction where this essential health care is not available.

Deterrence of Drug Use

The use of illicit drugs and misuse of prescription drugs are inconsistent with DoD policy and the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and have a substantial negative impact on performance in the inherently hazardous conditions of combat, and degrade safety and security for all personnel within the Department. To deter the use of illicit drugs, the Department is implementing an outreach strategy to inform Service members and their families on the facts and risks related to drug use including the impact on career and overall well-being, and promote and destigmatize substance use disorder. This initiative will utilize multiple communication touchpoints, including digital media, to amplify messaging and augment current Service-level

Not for publication until released by the Committee

prevention, education, and outreach initiatives. This effort will establish communication platforms that can widely disseminate information about drugs to include new and emerging drug threats, with the goal of reaching Service members across multiple social and digital media platforms.

Suicide Prevention

Every death by suicide is a tragedy and weighs heavily on the military community. The Department is steadfast in its commitment to suicide prevention, and the overall well-being of our Service members, their families, caregivers, and survivors. Suicide results from a complex interaction of psychological, biological, and environmental factors that vary among individuals. Because no two individuals are identical, our suicide-prevention efforts seek to enhance protective factors and address a range of risk factors.

We have a responsibility to care for our people and are committed to addressing this issue not only because of its impacts to those who serve our Nation, but also because it affects our missions. Our public health approach focuses on reducing suicide risk for all Service members and their families by targeting the various underlying risk factors (such as relationship, financial, and behavioral health stressors), recognizing the heightened risk for suicide among Service members who experience sexual assault and sexual harassment, while also enhancing protective factors (such as social connections, coping skills, and safety in one's environment).

We are working to enhance holistic, data-driven suicide prevention; non-clinical policy and programming, oversight, and engagement that address prevention across populations; and also clinical suicide prevention efforts with behavioral health services. The Department's approach to suicide prevention is focused on four key areas: fostering quality of life for Service members and their families; addressing stigma as a barrier to seeking help; improving clinical services; and promoting a culture of lethal-means safety.

Pursuant to the FY2022 NDAA, Secretary Austin directed the creation of the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee (SPRIRC) on March 22, 2022, and he further directed the committee to develop recommendations that could be implemented enterprise-wide. The SPRIRC conducted a comprehensive review of suicide prevention and response programs, visiting 11 installations both in and out of the continental U.S. and meeting

Not for publication until released by the Committee

with over 2,000 Service members and 600 civilians. In late February, it released its report to the public.

The report revealed four key themes to effectively reduce military suicide. First, restructuring suicide prevention training is required to standardize content and better resonate with Service members, in line with principles of Integrated Primary Prevention. Second, additional resources are needed to help Service members navigate and effectively access existing behavioral health and other support services. Third, we must ensure that Service members are safely storing personally owned firearms through focused training and accessible storage options. Lastly, we must emphasize leader stewardship through taking care of people and addressing Service member needs before problems become crises.

The SPRIRC report contains 127 recommendations with the vast majority aligning with the four pillars of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, and a small number reflecting the unique needs of military environments. The Department is diligently reviewing and preparing to implement applicable recommendations of the SPRIRC to enhance suicide prevention response efforts of the Department; to include efforts that can be taken swiftly and those that will require more persistent efforts to implement.

The Department has the responsibility to support and protect those who defend the United States and their families, and we must do everything possible to prevent suicide in our military community. Towards this goal, we seek to encourage help-seeking behaviors, eliminate stigma, and enable access to behavioral health clinical services for our Service members and their families.

Military Health System

The FY2017 NDAA enacted sweeping reforms to the organization and management of military medicine. The expanded responsibilities of the Defense Health Agency (DHA) are now largely complete. The DHA exercises authority, direction, and control over all Military Treatment Facilities (MTF) worldwide. The FY2017 NDAA also directed DoD to restructure or realign MTFs to support the Department's readiness requirements. However, the FY23 NDAA placed a one-year moratorium on any changes to the configuration of our MTFs. As requested, we are preparing an update to Congress on our way forward in the coming month.

Not for publication until released by the Committee

The FY23 NDAA also included a five-year moratorium on further military medical personnel reductions. Together with the Joint Staff, we are updating our medical requirements as combatant command operational plans are also updated. We are also conducting a comprehensive, internal review – with our OSD colleagues and the Military Departments—on the best configuration of medical infrastructure and personnel for the long-term. We are resolute in our commitment to ensure combatant commanders have the medical resources necessary to protect, treat and provide long-term medical services to our men and women in uniform.

We are also committing resources and attention to the ongoing challenge of suicide, to include addressing the shortage of mental health providers for both uniformed service members and family members. We recently received the recommendations from the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee, and are continuing to implement strategies that can help reverse the heart-breaking trends we have witnessed—both in DoD and in the nation.

The Department remains grateful for the long-term support from this committee for our military medical research program. In those areas of most pressing need and relevance to today’s emerging threats that include infectious disease, combat casualty care and other areas of critical importance to our warfighters, Congress’ support is critical to our success.

In 2022 and into 2023, the DHA has been able to focus its resources to supporting operational requirements of the Department, while continuing to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. There were a number of important milestones achieved by the DHA in the past year that will continue to influence operations in 2023 and into 2024. One of DHA’s achievements was migrating 75% of MTFs to the new Electronic Health Record (EHR), known as MHS GENESIS. In a few weeks, we will deploy this system in the National Capital Region. This modern EHR platform will provide the Department with a powerful tool to support our readiness mission, improve interoperability and record sharing with care delivered in the private sector, and allow our patients to engage more directly with their providers in managing their care.

Another major milestone is the use of virtual health. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the Department’s use of virtual health, and for the coming year, we will build on what we have learned and how our providers and patients effectively used technology throughout this public health emergency. DHA is creating a new digital health strategy that will expand our use of technology in ways that improve our training, preparedness, access, and quality of care.

Not for publication until released by the Committee

We intend to work with our military medical leaders and industry partners to focus on what can be achieved now, and build on our successes over time.

In late 2022, after a multi-year process, the DHA awarded the next generation of TRICARE contracts at a value of over \$135 billion over the next eight years. These contracts will deliver high-value, patient-centric care that integrates military and private sector care. In January, protests were filed that will slightly delay this transition. We are working closely with GAO and will ensure this process is carried out in a fair and timely way.

For the current fiscal year, our mid-year review is underway. As in past years, the Military Health System continues its sustained decade-long track record in responsibly managing health care costs – which remain below the National Health Expenditures per capita rate. Our FY2024 budget request presents a balanced, comprehensive strategy that aligns with the Secretary’s priorities. We look forward to working with you over the coming months to further refine and articulate our requirements.

Transition from the Military

We must provide the best support possible to our Service members who defend our country and keep it secure, especially as they prepare to transition into civilian life. In exchange for their dedicated service to our Nation, Service members should return to civilian life at the end of their commitment more competitive in the labor marketplace. This is the social contract that the Department makes with our Service members. When the DoD lives up to it, through programs like tuition assistance, credentialing, and Skillbridge, American society reaps the benefits. About 200,000 Service members transition out of the military each year. The transition from military to civilian life—especially the 365 days prior to and the 365 days post separation—is widely recognized as a challenging and stressful time for Service members and their families. To assist in the transition, the DoD partners with agencies across the federal government and with the private sector to ensure our Service members thrive once they leave military service.

Tuition Assistance, SkillBridge, and Credentialing

DoD’s Tuition Assistance (TA) program provides Service members with financial assistance to enhance their academic achievement (for example, earn a degree or certificate)

Not for publication until released by the Committee

during their off-duty time, which in turn improves job performance, promotion potential, self-development, personal quality of life, and overall readiness. While TA is not specifically designed in support of the Service members' transition out of the military, it also provides an ancillary benefit as an effective retention tool and supports their potential career after their service.

DoD's Credentialing, Apprenticeships (the United Services Military Apprenticeship Program – USMAP) and SkillBridge Employment Training programs exist on the spectrum of how military training, experience, and skills relate to increased mission readiness and ultimately result in successful post active-duty careers. The demand for credentialing from Service members and industry continues to grow. Professional credentialing is an integral key of the Services' recruiting, in-service development, promotion, retention, and transition strategies. SkillBridge allows Service members to deepen, broaden, and tailor the competencies that they developed through their military service to increase their compatibility and competitiveness in the civilian labor market starting up to six months before separation.

Transition Assistance Program

Transition Assistance Program (TAP) delivery is a collaborative effort between DoD, Department of Labor, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the Small Business Administration; each with a primary area of responsibility and focus. However, the program succeeds due to a robust interagency collaboration and communications strategy that encompasses these four agencies, and three additional agencies--Department of Homeland Security, Department of Education, and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. Working together, these seven agencies and the Services provide consistent messaging and ensure collaboration and synchronization in the delivery of the program.

During TAP, all transitioning Service members complete a Military Occupational Code (MOC) crosswalk. They compare their military skills to civilian career opportunities and identify any gaps in education and training that they can address to enhance civilian employability and marketability. The MOC crosswalk is set up to help all transitioning service members refine their goals. TAP also addresses transition-related risks and barriers as part of the initial counseling with a personal self-assessment administered by the Services. The self-assessment provides Commanders, TAP Counselors, and Service members with insights to and

Not for publication until released by the Committee

information about potential risks and levels of support required. This information facilitates development of the Service member's individual transition plan and steps to meet the Service member's individual transition goals. At the end of TAP, during the CAPSTONE event, Commanders and TAP Counselors review the efficacy of each Service member's individual transition plan. If the CAPSTONE review indicates a need or desire for follow on support, the Service member is connected via a warm handover to the appropriate agency or support organization for specialized assistance targeted to the Service member's specific needs.

DoD-VA Collaboration

The DoD continues to strengthen collaboration and coordination with our partners at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). With new authorities provided recently by Congress (NDAA FY21 and the PACT Act), both Departments are further leveraging shared resources and interconnected processes, programs, and initiatives to support Service members, Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. For FY2023, VA and DoD renewed our shared commitment to support health care collaboration, benefits and service delivery, and to enhance the transition process and post-separation experience, modernize shared business operations, and strengthen our interoperability.

VA and DoD senior leaders are now more interconnected and aware of how their decisions impact one another. As such, the VA-DoD Joint Executive Committee uses an intentional decision-making process that is Service member-and-Veteran centric, results-driven, and forward-looking throughout a Service member's career and transition to a Veteran.

Last year, DoD and VA signed the Joint Data and Analytics Strategy in an effort to optimize data, and to coordinate and share analytics. This is particularly important as we support the VA with the implementation of The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022, or PACT Act. DoD and VA are working to ensure the needed exchange of data to provide health care and benefits to Veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances, and to empower both agencies to make better decisions directly impacting Service members and Veterans health care.

One such example is the creation of a single, common VA-DoD Separation Health Assessment (SHA). Both Departments have worked closely to coalesce terminology, definitions and develop joint questions. The new common form reduces redundancies, saves time, allows

Not for publication until released by the Committee

for comparative analysis between Departments on health effect outcomes, and provides Service members more flexibility on where they can complete their separation health assessment. VA will begin using the OneSHA in the third quarter of FY23, and the DoD will implement the common form in the fourth quarter of FY23. Both VA and DoD are simultaneously making technological changes to their systems for employment of the new form.

CULTIVATE TALENT MANAGEMENT

The Department will maintain its high standards and is committed to helping those who desire to serve meet their goals and ambitions. We will continue to invest in recruiting and retaining the talented men and women who make up our All-Volunteer Force and the civilians who support them. With emerging practices and standards in the current labor market, the Department must reimagine the DoD workforce to recruit, retain, and develop the talent it needs.

Military Recruiting and Retention

Steady recruit flows are critical to the All-Volunteer Force. Given the tight labor market exacerbated by the residual effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and an increasing lack of familiarity with military service among young people, the Services continue to face a challenging recruiting environment. The Services are balancing declining end-strength with high retention, but the impact of repeatedly missing recruitment goals can create long-term challenges. Reinvigorating the recruiting pipeline requires senior DoD leader engagement, robust solutions to barriers to service, a concerted effort to rebuild public trust and inspire service, innovative approaches to messaging, and a commitment to consistent and substantial resource investments.

Recruiting challenges in FY2022 foreshadowed the increasing recruiting challenges faced in FY2023. Near historic lows at the beginning of FY2023 in the Services' Delayed Entry Programs contributed to the ongoing challenges. Market conditions continue to impact our recruiting efforts as we are in a fierce competition with the private sector for skilled and innovative talent. The propensity to serve in the military continues to be an issue with our youth as many do not believe military service is compatible with aspirational education and career goals. Nearly 50% of youth never considered joining the military, and 58% believe individuals leaving the military will have difficulty readjusting to everyday life.

Not for publication until released by the Committee

It is likely that recruiting challenges will continue to persist for the foreseeable future, and there is no one silver bullet or specific action that the Department or the Services can quickly take to resolve the current recruiting challenges. However, we are looking for ways to get to the heart of our citizens and youth, and galvanize our future Service members on the merit and value of contributing to the country's well-being through military service.

To this end, the Department is designing and implementing a comprehensive, broad outreach strategy that tells the DoD story and presents the vast opportunities military service brings. This multi-pronged effort includes campaigning through an interagency partnership with Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, and Selective Service that touts the personal benefits and the positive outcomes public service has on our country and our communities. In addition to cultivating a culture of service, a standing interagency collaboration offers a framework for prioritizing and coordinating service across Presidential administrations.

A large-scale, sustained National Military Advertising campaign is also needed to dispel inaccuracies and educate both youth and their influencers about the opportunities in the military. To support this initiative, the Department is requesting \$40 million in the FY2024 Defense Budget for a joint marketing campaign that focuses on youth and influencers. This campaign is critical to addressing misperceptions and garnering increased support of influencers who may help or support a young person's decision to join the military.

The outreach strategy also includes celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the All-Volunteer Force, the 75th Anniversary of President Truman's order to racially desegregate the Force and Congressional action to allow women to serve, and a robust strategic messaging campaign through senior leader engagements and community outreach initiatives that focus on reconnecting the military with America. P&R and the Military Services also continue to partner with the Department of Education on efforts to expand access of military recruiters to high school students through engagements with Chief State School officers, continued advancement of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), promotion of the Purple Star Program, and the expansion of the ASVAB Career Exploration program. Each of these efforts expand awareness of our military and the many benefits and opportunities that come with military service.

Not for publication until released by the Committee

We would appreciate your support for the Department's FY24 budget request, which will help address some of the recruiting issues. The Department is committed to overcoming recruiting challenges through strong collaboration and innovative ideas. We will leverage every competitive advantage we have in an already crowded labor market. Ensuring we have the right number of people—with the right skills and talent—has the highest attention of the Department's senior leadership. We are committed to not only meeting our military recruiting targets, but also finding the most qualified and mission-ready talent our nation has to offer.

DoD Civilian Workforce

The DoD civilian workforce possesses capabilities, expertise, and skills that directly impact DoD's worldwide military operational capabilities. As critical enablers of our warfighters, DoD civilians perform functions in intelligence, research and development, equipment maintenance, health care, family support, base operating services, and other activities that directly support the military forces and readiness. The Department continuously strives to improve its ability to recruit, retain, develop, and reward the civilian workforce to support the warfighter and encourage innovative best practices throughout the armed forces.

Competition for talent in innovation and cutting-edge fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), cyber, and health care that are in high demand across the public and private sectors continues to be one of the biggest challenges for hiring civilian talent. Largely due to Congress' support, the Department continues to utilize a variety of human capital solutions to better compete in the current labor market, including expanded use of direct hire authorities, incentives, and special pay where authorized. These hiring tools are critical to compete against the private sector by reducing our time-to-hire and allowing us to target the talent needed in key areas.

Following last summer's public release of the Defense Business Board's report on Civilian Talent Management, the Department took immediate action launching the Talent Management Executive Council that includes all Functional Community Managers and elevated its talent management framework to the highest levels of DoD, aligning talent management under the USD P&R with the Deputy Secretary of Defense exercising decision authority and oversight. We are also increasing outreach and marketing efforts to highlight opportunities through our DoD civilian careers website, social media content, and live in-person and virtual

Not for publication until released by the Committee

events. The Department is also expanding our development and use of work roles to better identify what skills we need versus what skills we have. These insights will be critical to upskilling and reskilling our current workforce and to best address shortfalls in critical and high-demand skills.

Over the past several months, the Department has been researching and collecting talent management best practices and developing a Talent Management Best Practices Playbook. The playbook shares insights on talent management approaches from some of America's most successful companies, as well as successful practices from other federal agencies. We have also established a working group to look at designing a hiring model that will reduce the time of "contact to contract." The Department is in a fierce competition for talent and a critical component of this competition is the ability to hire talented people in a timely manner.

Additionally, we are in the process of hiring our inaugural Chief Talent Management Officer who will lead the development of DoD's talent management strategy. The CTMO will report directly to the USD P&R and will orchestrate the numerous talent management efforts across the DoD to include areas such as recruitment and outreach, and learning and development opportunities. These actions, and the many other strategic workforce planning and human capital management activities, support the Department's need to shape a professional, agile, and ready civilian workforce.

ADVANCE STRATEGIC READINESS

Building and maintaining our strategic advantage, as underscored by the National Defense Strategy, requires that we remain prepared to confront near term challenges while taking steps necessary to be ready in the future. Advancing strategic readiness means ensuring our ability to build, maintain, and balance warfighting capabilities and competitive advantages to achieve strategic objectives across threat and time horizons.

Strategic Readiness Framework

The Deputy Secretary of Defense directed P&R to lead the establishment of the strategic readiness framework emphasized in the 2022 National Defense Strategy. Since then, P&R has convened the resources and stakeholder support necessary to integrate the concept of strategic readiness throughout the Department to inform a broader understanding of the impacts of

Not for publication until released by the Committee

decisions on readiness. We are developing an analytic framework that integrates models across the Department to provide greater visibility on the readiness tradeoffs incurred by today's decisions and assessments that capture the quantifiable, cumulative, and cascading impacts of strategic readiness in DoD programs, policies, and strategies. This holistic view of readiness is designed to drive decision advantage by integrating processes to provide leaders with comprehensive, objective assessments of the strategic readiness-related risks and tradeoffs associated with our decisions.

A notable example of the strategic readiness framework is the P&R-led process to assess the potential strategic readiness impacts of providing security assistance to Ukraine. We assess these potential impacts against our other known requirements – such as training – and account for defense industrial base information, so that we have a clear picture of our own supply timeline. This assessment process then identifies what actions the Department can take to mitigate readiness impacts. The support Congress has provided to the Department through supplemental appropriations is critical in allowing us to add resilience to our industrial base and replenish our own stocks. In some scenarios, we have even been able to accelerate modernization plans as a by-product of our support to Ukraine and the data-driven mitigation process we have in place. We are already taking the lessons learned through the Ukraine security assistance process to inform and refine the strategic readiness framework and how we assess, quantify, and mitigate potential strategic readiness impacts across our processes.

Professional Military Education (PME)

The Department is updating PME to make it more effective and relevant to the National Defense Strategy (NDS). Our War Colleges and Command and Staff Colleges have adjusted the framing of appropriate aspects of their core curricula to address the challenges of strategic competition with China and Russia. The FY24 budget request supports the strengthening of the national security workforce, consistent with the President's National Security Memorandum (NSM-3), *Revitalizing America's Foreign Policy and National Security Workforce, Institutions, and Partnerships*. The PME enterprise, and Joint PME in particular, have set a high bar for developing the knowledge and habits of mind for the U.S. profession of arms.

The NDS states that PME will “foster critical thinking and analytical skills, fluency in critical languages, and integration of insights from the social and behavioral science.” P&R is

Not for publication until released by the Committee

overseeing the implementation of these efforts through policy, governance, and talent management levers. DoDI 1322.35, Volume 1, “Military Education: Program Management and Administration,” directs the military education institutions to design, develop, and deliver outcomes-based military education (OBME) programs. Program outcomes form a critical bridge between PME and operational performance. The Department is implementing this first-ever DoD policy on PME, synchronizing educational and operational requirements, and assessing outcomes in order to improve talent management and strengthen educational impact.

We are also adapting manpower and personnel systems to collect and utilize performance information to improve talent management. This data-informed talent management approach is most evident in our efforts to improve management of critical language skills to address longstanding issues with the recruitment, training, utilization, and retention of cryptologic language analysts and to meet National Security Agency and Service requirements for professional level proficiency. Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) skills are critical to the DoD mission and must be managed to optimize their accession, development, sustainment, enhancement, and employment. LREC skills improve the effectiveness of the total force by enhancing linkages with allies and partners, as well as providing direct and often immediate insight into potential adversary capability, intention, and activity, which is essential for the challenges of near-peer, strategic competition.

We also oversee discrete programs such as the Secretary of Defense Strategic Thinkers Program, a highly competitive 10-month master’s degree program, enrolling a select cohort of active duty military officers from across the Services in a specialized track within John Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). The Department has also increased the number of international officers participating in the U.S. PME system. Relationships built in the classroom undergird the hard power of coalition interoperability with Allies and partners on the battlefield.

Developing Service members who understand the evolving nature of the security environment and how it potentially affects American interests, warfare, and the dimensions of strategic competition requires a PME system that keeps pace. Strategic readiness involves not only having the necessary equipment and technology, but also Service members who have the training and education to compete in a new era of competition.

Preparing for the Pacing Challenge

Training is critical to preparing the Joint Force to meet the pacing challenge. Rapid technological advancement and threat evolution continue to outpace training modernization, widening the gap between how the Joint Force trains and how it will conduct multi-domain operations in a contested environment. To win the joint, multi-domain battles of today and the future, combat forces must have joint interoperable training environments robust enough to support large numbers of joint and coalition warfighters simultaneously, and advanced enough to simulate high-end combat in the all-domain battlespace.

To answer this foundational challenge, we have chartered a new governance body with the Joint Staff, Military Services and Combatant Commands to accelerate the pace of change in the training community and quickly develop and execute realistic, joint, interoperable, and multi-domain training capabilities to meet the threats from peer adversaries in a contested environment. We are driving pacing threat training into the synthetic world, while also increasing the capabilities of large-scale training areas, to replicate the complex, joint, multi-domain fight. Given the key role of Allies and partners in the NDS, we are also breaking down barriers in our training programs, exercises, and security policies to enable greater ally and partner participation.

CONCLUSION

As we look to the future, it is imperative that we do not take for granted what makes our U.S. Military unparalleled and unmatched. It is our people – the Active, Reserve, National Guard, DoD Civilians and all of their families, caregivers, and survivors who are willing to serve this country. They are the bedrock of our national security.

Thank you for your continued support of our Service members and their families, we look forward to your questions.