**Mr. Nickolas Guertin**
**Nomination Hearing for Director, Operational Test and Evaluation**
**Opening Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee**

Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, it is a privilege to be with you here today. I am humbled to be considered to serve as the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation. I would like to thank President Biden, Secretary Austin, and Deputy Secretary Hicks for entrusting me with this nomination. I would also like to thank my family whom you see behind me for their support; Maria, my wife of almost 20 years and our twin children Enrico and Isabella of whom we are both immensely proud.

The greatest asset of the Department of Defense is undoubtedly its people. Our men and women in uniform and our civilian and contractor workforce make the American military the best in the world. However, our ability to defend the Nation also depends on the capabilities of our technologies, which must be tested as they would be used in combat. Injecting operationally realistic testing early into a program's development allows the Department to implement affordable, comprehensive changes, making the best and most efficient use of taxpayer resources, and ultimately, achieving the greatest possible performance. Transparency on the results of those tests are critical to ensuring the most effective, suitable, survivable, and where necessary, lethal performance. If confirmed, I am committed to ensuring that the office of the Director for Operational Test and Evaluation will deliver an independent, objective, and authoritative evaluation of system performance to you and to Secretary Austin.

Testing the way we fight in the future will require evolutionary and revolutionary changes – ones that cannot be successfully planned or implemented without teamwork. It will require increased reliance on state-of-the art test infrastructure and tools, and a well-trained test and evaluation workforce in order to support faster and more effective evaluation of complex, interconnected systems in a joint, multi-domain operational environment. It will require reliance on innovative methods like credible virtual environments and modeling and simulation tools to complement on-range and laboratory testing. If confirmed, I am committed to working closely with our research and engineering community, acquisition programs, and the Services so that together, we can most effectively deliver capability to the Joint Force.

I take this commitment to national security seriously, having spent the past four decades working on, developing, testing, fielding, and researching the acquisition of military systems. I started my career as an enlisted nuclear power plant operator on submarines. I later transitioned to the Reserves and after graduating college, landed a job as a Navy civilian engineer. Shortly afterwards I was also commissioned as a Reserve engineering duty officer. This citizen-sailor pairing would serve me well for the following decade by keeping me grounded in what it took to do maintenance, operations, and testing in the fleet, while also developing new systems. Testing had long been a central tenet to this experience, from developing automated test equipment for weapon components, to testing and deploying new sensor and combat management systems that were built to change and improve over time.

Improving acquisition practices for national security systems has long been a passion of mine. It started when I was fortunate enough to be on the team that pioneered the use of open architectures for sonar systems in the mid-1990s. I have been on the forefront of developing and applying a wide array of improved acquisition practices, and helping others do the same ever since. More recently, while at Carnegie Mellon University's Software Engineering Institute, I learned a great deal about the evolving practices of software-reliant system architectures, DevOps practices, the application of machine learning and artificial intelligence, and test automation to name a few. While at the SEI, I have also extended the research I performed while in Government on advanced systems development methods for improving DoD acquisition outcomes.

As Secretary Austin has testified: "We have the greatest equipment in the world." If confirmed, it is my objective to ensure that assessment continues to hold true, providing for the best trained, best equipped, and most capable warfighting force in the world. It would be an honor to contribute to that mission, and to serve as the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation. Thank you.