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Prepared Statement

of

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Chair Speier, Ranking Member Gallagher, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the status of the Department of Defense's implementation of recommendations approved by Secretary Lloyd Austin from the 2021 Independent Review Commission (IRC) on Sexual Assault in the Military.

Efforts to stop sexual assault and sexual harassment are among the most important initiatives the Department is taking to support our greatest assets: our warfighters. Implementation of IRC recommendations represent the most historic and substantial changes to the Department's efforts to eliminate these crimes from our ranks.

Since day one on the job, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin made addressing sexual assault and sexual harassment a top priority. The Secretary's actions, including his direction to implement all IRC recommendations wherever possible, reflect the Department's deep commitment to combatting sexual assault, sexual harassment and other harmful behaviors. In September 2021, Secretary Austin signed the "Implementation Roadmap" memorandum that directed a comprehensive approach to implement the IRC recommendations across four tiers:

1. Tier 1 recommendations are foundational for all IRC efforts. They are either top priority or they represent necessary enhancements to infrastructure to apply best-in-practice sexual assault and sexual harassment accountability, prevention, and response programs.
2. Tier 2 recommendations either depend on the execution of a Tier 1 action or build directly on Tier 1 infrastructure to apply best-in-practice strategies (e.g., training, education).

3. Tier 3 recommendations are either chronologically or practically dependent on the execution of a Tier 1 or 2 action, and they will expand or endure programs and practices within the DoD, throughout the implementation of recommendations.
4. Tier 4 recommendations are either chronologically or practically dependent on the execution of a previous Tier action or will expand programs or policies outside of the DoD's purview.

To ensure expedient, methodical, and standardized implementation of the IRC reforms across these four tiers, OSD has worked closely with the Services to provide detailed guidance and build oversight mechanisms to ensure implementation stays on track. This includes the IRC Outcome Metrics Evaluation Report, which provides a methodological framework for tracking implementation status and effectiveness for each recommendation. The report also proposes a strategy for regular progress reviews through the Deputy's Workforce Council, a forum co-chaired by the Deputy Secretary of Defense and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and includes membership from across OSD and the Services. This level of oversight and accountability is a significant departure from previous reform efforts in this space, and ensures not only comprehensive implementation, but also that the Department can adjust course as roadblocks are identified or refinements are needed. This process has allowed the Department to make significant progress on implementation. We are not just making progress; we are building the lasting infrastructure needed to effectuate real change.

To this end, we are urgently implementing the IRC's recommendations to build a brand-new specialized and dedicated prevention workforce that will support leaders' ability to build healthy command climates that do not tolerate sexual assault, sexual harassment or other harmful behaviors. We are building this new workforce from the ground-up, and much of our implementation has focused on building an infrastructure to ensure this new capability is truly

effective. This includes developing education and training requirements for the workforce, a tiered credentialing system, a prevention workforce model for use by the Services, and revising and expanding our Prevention Plan of Action. This ensures the Department is taking a comprehensive and standardized approach to this new workforce. The Department is now in the process of hiring the first cohort of prevention professionals. At full operating capability, this workforce will include over 2,000 personnel who will be stationed at our installations around the world. We recognize the unique challenge hiring specialized professionals poses in this labor market, and OUSD (P&R) has worked to create a targeted recruitment plan to support the Services in their hiring efforts. This includes the recent establishment of a dedicated hiring authority to ensure that we are able to quickly identify and on-board these professionals. It also means working closely with colleges and universities across the country, recruiting within our military spouse community, and doing other targeted hiring events and outreach.

We are also working closely with the Military Services to fully professionalize the Department's victim response workforce. This includes ensuring this workforce has the capacity to focus on victim needs by eliminating the function as a collateral duty and building a full-time and dedicated response workforce. We are also working to increase victim trust in response services by ensuring that our response workforce is independent and outside of the chain of command. Finally, the Department will soon reach initial operating capability for our Sexual Assault Prevention & Response Training & Education Center of Excellence to ensure that we have standardized, quality, and skills-based training across the Services.

The Department is also undertaking the most significant military justice reform in decades with the implementation of the Offices of Special Trial Counsel. This will ensure independent, specialized expertise in prosecutorial decisions for the covered offenses of sexual assault, domestic violence, and related crimes, and is essential to restoring trust in the military

justice system. We know these reforms are imperative, as this year's report on sexual assault in the military revealed that Service members who do not report their sexual assault indicate significant lack of trust in what, if anything, will be done: of Service members who indicate experiencing sexual assault, 43% of women, and 31% of men, note their decision not to report due to "not trusting the process would be fair."

Along with Secretary Austin, the Military Departments are deeply committed to ensuring the success of these reforms, and in OSD we have been working diligently to support the Services in every way possible with implementation.

I am confident this subcommittee has reviewed the Fiscal Year 2021 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, which shows in stark detail what our prior activities and the IRC on Sexual Assault in the Military have already documented: Sexual assault and sexual harassment remain persistent and corrosive problems in our force. While the numbers are deeply disappointing, they largely reflect a climate before the Department began implementation of these historic reforms. The findings of the report reinforce the urgent need to continue the unprecedented actions the Department is taking to address sexual assault in our military, and provide clear direction for continued momentum in implementing the IRC's recommendations. The Department has clearly heard from our Service members that action and change are desperately needed, and the Department is answering that call.

Although we wish we could immediately create the lasting change that all of us desire, getting this right requires that we build the right foundation – a strong foundation – from which we can build infrastructure that lasts. As a result, we are moving as expeditiously as possible – to implement change – while also ensuring we do not rush to failure. If we improperly rush now, we will not be able to pick up the pieces and establish trust again.

Progress thus far has been made possible with constructive leadership emphasis, your continued engagement on this issue, deliberate programmatic and procedural changes, and resource investments. We all recognize, there is no single-solution to solve the problems before us, but we all have the resolve to effectuate positive and lasting change. As Secretary of Defense Austin has stated on more than one occasion: “We have a true opportunity to lead. And we will.” We look forward to hearing from everyone today. Thank you for everything the Subcommittee does to partner with the Department on this important issue.

Madam chair, I also wish to thank you for your many years of extraordinary public service not only to your constituents but to the members of our Armed Forces, their dependents, and all of their loved ones. Your legislative accomplishments, passion, and constant dedication to work with the Department has made us better and improved the lives of countless Service members. Most importantly, you have stood up for those who often were most in need of allies and support. Your exceptional advocacy will be forever appreciated by Service members now and many years into the future. Indeed, the historic and unprecedented nature of the reforms we are discussing today – which lay a foundation for progress that will outlast each of us -- is in no small part because of your leadership. Thank you.