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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

**STATEMENT**  
**OF**  
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**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**  
**BEFORE THE**  
**MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE**  
**OF THE**  
**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
**CONCERNING**  
**PERSONNEL POSTURE**  
**ON**  
**17 APRIL 2024**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, it is my privilege to appear before you today to provide testimony on Marine Corps personnel. The Marine Corps' performance in future battles will be defined in large part by the talent management investments made today and in the future. That is why we are in the midst of implementing a modernized talent management system that better harnesses, develops, and retains the unique skills and strengths demanded of Marines by Force Design and in support of our nation's defense.

## **RECRUITING**

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

Your Marine Corps made its recruiting mission in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 and is currently on track to meet it again this FY. Officer and prior service recruiting missions for the Marine Corps continue to be successful, despite enduring enlisted recruiting challenges. As we embark on the next 50 years of the All-Volunteer Force, we are reminded that it is more accurately an "All-Recruited Force." Service to our nation and the military remains an aspirational pathway to greater opportunities – both in and out of uniform. And service as a Marine continues to attract those who meet our standards and aspire to prove themselves worthy of earning the title. We must collectively ensure the health of our All-Volunteer Force and the strategic advantage it provides – talent, capability, and warfighting excellence. The CMC remains committed to providing resources and sending the very best Marines to become recruiters in order to achieve the accession mission while sustaining quality and standards. One in four of our general officers have been recruiters during their career, and we pride ourselves in assigning a sergeant major to every recruiting station. This is the bedrock of successful Marine Corps recruiting.

A significant concern now and going forward is our start pool of 22%, which was leveraged to ensure mission accomplishment, and is now well below the traditional 50% level. This requires Marine recruiters to focus on finding individuals to ship in the near-term, impacting their time to physically and mentally prepare for the rigors of the transformation process to Marine. We are working to grow the start pool, but it is a slow and deliberate process. Re-alignment of recruiters and recruiting assets will help. In keeping with Marines' tenet of "exploit success," we are increasing our recruiting force by several hundred recruiters. We will continue to need robust resourcing – to include advertising and modernization funds – to ensure success. We also look forward to the Department's assessment of the medical screening process from the Military Health System GENESIS Task Force with a focus on finding efficiencies and increasing staffing of MEPCOM's medical providers.

## **What We Are Doing to Address the Challenge**

Sustaining Quality. Your enlisted Marines are exceptionally talented, skilled, dedicated, and motivated to serve - meeting our high standards; we will never sacrifice this quality. The Marine Corps exceeds Department of Defense (DOD) standards by every measure of quality, and it takes Marine recruiters connecting with communities in every zip code to sustain.

Expanding Markets. Marines are the strength of the Corps, and we deliberately and continuously engage young people from the full spectrum of backgrounds, experiences, race and ethnicity, and gender to draw the best talent into our ranks. Over the past decade, racially/ethnically diverse enlisted accessions increased from 34% to 57%, and the same category of officer accessions more than doubled from 16% to 35%. Enlisted female accessions remain steady at 9%, and female officer accessions have increased to 13%.

Adapting Advertising. The Marine Corps advertising program is essential to building awareness among high quality populations that are increasingly unfamiliar with military service. Advertising funds repay many times over, producing lower first-term attrition, higher quality Marines, and increased readiness. Robust and sustained advertising funding is essential, now more than ever. We are thankful for Congressional support to modernize how we recruit in today's increasingly online world.

## **Where We Need Assistance**

National Dialogue on Service. Those who have served in uniform depart the ranks with professionalism, maturity, leadership, and skills that translate well into the civilian workforce. Veterans serve ably in industries, commercial sectors, and government across the nation, bringing enhanced leadership and an exceptional work ethos back to their communities. However, messaging about service to the country competes within a crowded and fragmented media environment – which often promotes a different narrative. We must challenge the misconceptions and misinformation about military service. We must converge at the highest levels and bolster a whole-of-Government national dialogue to inform young men and women, and their parents and influencers, about the value of honorable service in uniform and not solely rely on service messaging. We recognize our veterans are a key part of this and we seek to better leverage opportunities like Skillbridge to enhance the dialogue on service in and out of uniform.

Access to High Schools. We thank Congress for its continued support for recruiter access to high schools and colleges. The FY2024 national Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) provided additional timeliness guidelines for recruiter access to directory lists. However, continued vigilance is essential to ensure that recruiters have consistent and quality access to ensure the ability to recruit the best. The single biggest reason we hear from young people for not joining the Corps is that they simply weren't aware of the potential opportunities. Maintaining consistent access to high schools and student directories remains

a top priority for ensuring continued opportunity for all qualified individuals to serve. We will certainly come to Congress with new ideas to further improve recruiting.

## **RETENTION**

As a result of Force Design, we shifted from a “recruit and replace” to an “invest and retain” model with immediately positive results. We are in the midst of transitioning to a more experienced enlisted force characterized by increased retention and contract utilization; this will give us the technical and leadership intensive skills necessary on 21st-century battlefields. At the same time, the Service is increasing investment in quality of life and quality of service initiatives most closely related to the care of and retention of Marines and their families. We have implemented five major reforms initiatives: 1) the Commandant's Active and Reserve Retention Program, 2) the extended FTAP retention model 3) the small unit leadership initiatives, 4) promotion allocation fulfillment, 5) Marine Corps Graduate education Program Enlisted pilot. All efforts are focused on sustaining combat readiness by increasing the number of trained, experienced, and deployable Marines across the total force.

Although recruiting conditions are challenging, once your Marines become Marines, they want to “stay Marine.” We had historic retention in FY23 and are on track to meet mission again in FY24. We are seeing success across demographic groups as well. Enlisted women have been retained at a 5% higher proportional rate at both their first re-enlistment and subsequent term re-enlistments when compared to male re-enlistees. Female officers retain higher than their male counterparts at typical decision points which coincide with end of initial contracts, end of obligation due to accepting orders, and retirement eligibility. Despite these successes, the retention environment is competitive. We continue to experience challenges retaining certain communities, like aviation, cyber, and some of our intelligence specialties. Of particular importance is aviation retention. Assessments have shown this must be viewed holistically and cannot be solved by bonuses alone. We are exploring monetary and non-monetary incentives, to include improving aircraft readiness rates and flying hours, and increasing the production pipeline throughput, all of which will support increased operational readiness. We pride ourselves on the ability to develop quality citizens, and a successful transition from uniformed service can be just as important as the initial transformation of becoming a Marine. To that end we continue to study transition and support programs as we seek to better balance benefits to the individual against operational requirements of the Corps.

We thank Congress – especially this Subcommittee - for the incentives, flexibilities, and special pays you have authorized. They enable the development of better strategic talent pools and increase access to our talent for longer periods and with more options to better access and match it to warfighting requirements. The current and future environment also necessitates employment of non-traditional approaches, skillsets, and talent management systems to enable the Marine Corps to prevail and win

against peer-competitors, while competing with industry and others to attract and inspire the highest quality of individuals to serve. We are studying and implementing many of these as part of Talent Management.

### **Incentives & Special Pays**

We continue to use both monetary and non-monetary incentives to retain, match, and assign Marines to billets that are appropriate for their experience and skill. Selective Reenlistment Bonuses for active and reserve Marines allow shaping specific personnel requirements by targeting critical military occupational specialties and supporting lateral movement of Marines to these billets. For FY24, we continue to be proactive in the retention campaign by designing complementary monetary and non-monetary incentive packages – tailored to individual Marines with unique desires and aspirations.

The Marine Corps has established a Pacific (PAC) Cell to focus solely on improving quality of life and morale for our Marines, civilian workforce, and families throughout the strategic Indo-Pacific. The PAC Cell is engaged with those units stationed throughout the Pacific and has solicited feedback directly from them. One idea we are studying is the adequacy of policies regarding shipment and storage of privately owned vehicles for Marines stationed overseas. This would improve spouse employment, access to childcare, and other quality of life priorities. We are also considering other monetary and non-monetary incentives to reduce the cost and stress of executing orders to overseas locations for those in uniform and Civilian Marines. We thank Congress for your support in Marine quality of life and look forward to working with you on any policies that may require legislative action.

### **Compensation**

Competitive compensation is a foundation of the all-volunteer force with impacts to both recruiting and retention. Currently, basic pay and accompanying benefits, such as housing, medical care, bonuses and allowances, and tax advantages, are competitive. However, inflation impacts the value of military pay, so we appreciate the 5.2% pay raise this year. We must ensure that our Marines receive competitive pay and are positioned to be less susceptible to economic volatility. The Department is studying compensation holistically as part of the Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation, and we are participating in this study and look forward to its results.

### **Audit**

As we invest in new platforms, barracks, and training, it is our responsibility as good stewards of taxpayer funds to continue to prove that when the Corps is provided a taxpayer dollar, we can show exactly where and how it has been invested – a responsibility we take very seriously. Following a

rigorous two-year audit, the Marine Corps achieved an unmodified audit opinion, the best possible outcome – and the first time in the Department of Defense’s history that any service has received an unmodified audit opinion. These results demonstrate how seriously the Marine Corps takes its stewardship of taxpayer funds and our ability to account for and put to best use every dollar trusted to the service. This audit supports what we have believed for a long time – when Congress provides the Marine Corps a dollar, we invest it wisely, and we can tell you exactly where and how it was spent to further our Nation’s national security objectives. The Marine Corps worked with independent public accountants to validate budgetary balances and records and to audit physical assets at installations and bases across the globe. These actions included counting military equipment, buildings, structures, supplies, and ammunition held by the Marine Corps and our DoD Partners. The audit’s favorable opinion was only possible through the support and hard work of numerous dedicated Marines, civilian Marines, and many other partners across DoD. Nonetheless, we will not rest on our laurels; the audit report pointed out some areas for improvement, and we will use these recommendations to make our fiscal practices even better.

### **Healthcare**

Healthcare remains consistently highlighted by Marines and families as a factor in their career retention decisions. Quality healthcare for our Marines is the minimum standard and vital to the retention of the force and family. To care for our families, and those who support our service adjacent to our ranks, is also imperative. It is a growing perception that access and quality of medical care is eroding, and it has emerged as a factor in decisions to continue to serve in uniform.

The challenge is particularly acute overseas in locations such as Japan, where network care in the civilian community is not always readily accessible nor at the standard set by the Department of Defense for our Marines and their families. The United State Indo-Pacific Command is of heightened strategic importance and access to quality healthcare must be a priority. We look forward to the results of the review of healthcare quality directed in the FY24 NDAA.

### **TALENT MANAGEMENT**

Talent Management (TM) is the act of aligning the talents of Marines with the needs of the service to maximize the potential of both - increasing Marine Corps combat capability and readiness. It describes a fundamental redesign of our personnel system to maximize the number of fully trained, qualified, experienced, and deployable Marines within our total force. The overarching goal is to increase Marine Corps combat capability and remain the premier expeditionary force-in-readiness. TM requires that we recruit and retain the best talent, modernize the assignment process consistent with our warfighting philosophy, introduce new measures to increase career flexibility, and utilize modern digital

tools, processes, and analytics, with transparency. Throughout this redesign, we remain committed to our high standards that attract young Americans to the Marine Corps and drive warfighting outcomes and the sacrifice, pride, and dedication necessary to achieve the hard-earned title Marine. We honor the commitment as new Marines arrive in our ranks expecting meaningful and challenging assignments and a culture of professionalism, pride, mutual trust, and respect. Marines are responding to efforts to recognize their talents, and I ask for your continued support of these efforts. Much like the overarching approach to Force Design, TM is a multi-year, total force effort – a service-wide strategic design process that we are executing.

Some of our promising talent management initiatives include:

- Commandant's Retention Program (CRP) identifies the most competitive Marines and offers them an opportunity to stay a Marine via a pre-approved reenlistment. Since introduction in FY23, the number of Marines selected for CRP increased steadily to over 3,000 Marines recently selected for FY25. In order to capture the benefits of both Early Reenlistment Authority and CRP, these two programs were combined for FY25.
- Staff Non-Commissioned Officer (SNCO) Promotion Board Realignment realigns promotion boards to better sequence the assignment and reenlistment processes to reduce SNCO billet gaps in the fleet and condense the processing time of reenlistment packages. The realignment also provides greater predictability for SNCOs and their families while reducing change of stations moves affecting families during the school year.
- Special Duty Assignment (SDA) Volunteer Program expansion allows Marine volunteers to provide duty station preference for volunteer recruiters, drill instructors, and combat instructors. This program increased volunteers by 62%, which reduces involuntary screenings and improves morale and retention.
- Direct Affiliation Program (DAP) affords qualified Active Component Marines the opportunity to seamlessly transition to the Reserve Component with no break in service. This program also provides numerous benefits not offered to traditional reserve accessions from the Individual Ready Reserve to include bonuses of up to \$25,000 for a 3-year drilling commitment.
- Increasing Lateral Movement allows Marines to follow their career goals, while staying in the Marine Corps family. To ensure the even distribution of retained talent across the force, we will continue incentivizing lateral move opportunities for qualified Marines by reducing administrative barriers to lateral moves and offering targeted bonuses for high-demand, low-density skills.

Other initiatives in development:

- Improving MOS assignment. We are developing a better, more predictive, data-driven matching tool that will optimally align applicant interest, Primary Military Occupational Specialty (PMOS) skill requirements, and the needs of the Marine Corps. Using this new Marine Corps Occupational Skills Matching (MCOSM) tool for enlisted Marines, we will better align interests and talents with the needs of the Service. Potential applications for MCOSM extend beyond accessions, and we plan to utilize it to assist in PMOS classifications and career retention.
- Retention Prediction Network (RPN). We are currently developing the RPN, a program used to identify potential recruit's likelihood to enlist and continue to serve through their first enlistment and beyond. RPN was a multi-year collaborative effort with academia that harnessed vast quantities of manpower data to provide data-informed talent management decisions. The objective is to better recruit individuals with attributes aligned with becoming Marines.
- Talent Marketplace. The Talent Management Engagement Portal (TMEP) will modernize the current assignments system with a Total Force, transparent, data-based environment that allows Marines, commands, and duty assignment professionals to collaborate on the assignments process. At full implementation, TMEP is envisioned to utilize advanced analytics supported by artificial intelligence and machine learning elements to enable a market-style assignment system. It will allow for more informed decisions throughout a Marine's career, providing data on factors including billet availability, assignment desirability, family considerations and potential career paths.
- Promotion Opt Out allows officers to opt out of promotion without penalty and enables them to complete a broadening assignment, advanced education, career progression requirement, or other assignment. We implemented this authority in CY22 and we will continue to assess program efficacy and measure the impacts on the deliberate development of our leaders.
- Marine Corps Graduate Education Program – Enlisted has opened attendance at the Naval Post-Graduate School (NPS) to selected enlisted Marines to earn a master's degree in specific programs. Six highly qualified enlisted Marines were selected for the initial and second cohort and will be ready for assignment later this year or next depending on degree received.

The talent management success thus far is dependent on modern technology systems, and we are working toward modernizing the IT portfolio and consolidating older, disparate systems into a small subset of interoperable, multi-faceted applications that ride on a single IT system hosted in the cloud. Cloud migration allows IT efficiencies and effectively scaled applications, databases, and services across the enterprise to meet emergent requirements in a dynamic environment. As we migrate to the cloud, we will be able to optimize and capitalize on the promise of artificial intelligence and machine learning. An area of interest and future support is acquisition authority for software development and update. Our



vision of cloud-based, application-accessible platforms must move at the “speed of relevance.” The goal is to have modern technology with increased capabilities to enable the management of Marines’ careers.

### **Building Strong Teams**

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

Since 2010, racially/ethnically diverse enlisted accessions have increased from 34% to 57% and similar officer accessions have increased from 16% to 35%. Women serving in combat arms units are continuing to increase. Currently, nearly 20% of Brigadier Generals and Brigadier General selects are of diverse racial, ethnic or gender background. We remain committed to efforts to reach out to every segment of this nation to find those patriotic youth inspired to become a Marine.

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

Fighting effectiveness is not just built on unit training; it is also built on trust and maintained with a Marine’s support structure at home and in their communities. Marines rely on the institution to provide them and their families with stability. To that end, we recognize the importance of Marine and family predictability and support it as a major line-of-effort for successfully achieving our talent management goals and combat readiness.

Marine Corps Total Fitness. The Marine Corps is promoting and strengthening support of Marine Corps Total Fitness (MCTF) across the enterprise. MCTF is a framework for optimizing human performance, mission readiness, and resilience that emphasizes four primary domains: Mental, physical, spiritual, and social. The goals of MCTF align with the Marine Corps integrated primary prevention efforts to improve overall wellness and resilience for Marines and families. We are developing Warrior Athlete Readiness and Resilience (WARR) centers that will consolidate health, wellness, prevention, and performance capabilities. We seek enhanced coping and resiliency skills through stress identification and mitigation, positive psychology informed approaches to relationships and parenting, and peer-to-peer mentorship. Thus far, WARR centers have opened at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune and Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, with others in the works. We appreciate Congress’ support of this initiative to promote the performance and resiliency of the Corps and our families.

## **Family Support**

Permanent Change of Station (PCS) Flexibility. The Marine Corps continues to prioritize stability for units and reduce the stress placed on Marine and their families. PCS moves, while essential, can be disruptive. Since 2016, we have reduced PCS moves by utilizing Permanent Change of Assignment (PCA) orders more often. Through TM, we seek to further increase PCS flexibility, balancing it with both the needs of the individual Marine's career, their family, and the service.

Childcare. High quality childcare is one of the many important child and youth programs we offer. It is a readiness priority for the Marine Corps. Our CDCs currently serve more than 30,000 children, and we have waitlists for less than 1,000 children, primarily at Camp Pendleton, Hawaii, Quantico, and Camp Lejeune/New River.

While waitlists are caused by a variety of factors, we share the national challenge of employee turnover rates. We are addressing childcare waitlist issues through emphasis on hiring efforts and a non-competitive childcare employee transfer program. We added over \$100 million to the Child and Youth Program portfolio beginning FY2023 through 2027 to hire more employees at increased wages to help retain a professional workforce. Our average CDC employee salary is now higher than those outside the gate at most installations, and direct care employees are also offered priority placement and a childcare fee discount. Many of our CDC employees are Marine spouses, which contributes to annual turnover due to PCS. To address this challenge, we have implemented a CDC employee non-competitive transfer program to enable employees to transfer from their current position to one at a different installation with ease. This has provided dividends, allowing retention of more than 180 spouse employees we may have otherwise lost. As a result of these efforts, current CDC employee turnover rate is 20%, considerably less than the 34% rate last year.

We also offer childcare fee assistance for eligible Marines who are assigned to an installation with a significant waitlist. Over the last three FYs, the rate of fee assistance utilization has increased steadily for both community-based childcare providers as well as children served. In Fiscal Year 2023, over 1,600 children were enrolled in the fee assistance program at over 620 community-based providers, at a total cost of \$6.1 million. We recently increased the maximum amount of fee assistance, which will undoubtedly help our Marine families, especially those in high-cost areas.

Spouse Employment. Spouse employment is also important for many Marine Corps families and can be a significant factor in their financial security, readiness, and retention. Family Member Employment Assistance Program is available at each Marine Corps installation and provides employment related referral services, career and skill assessments, career coaching, job search guidance, portable career opportunities, and education center referrals/guidance. We also reimburse eligible Marine spouses

up to \$1,000 for state licensure and certification costs arising from relocation to another state. We appreciate Congress' recent expansion of this program and continued support.

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

Sexual assault is a crime – these behaviors are antithetical to our culture of honor, courage, and commitment, and respect. The Marine Corps Sexual Assault Prevention & Response program's (SAPR) goal is to counter sexual assaults before they occur and to provide services for those affected by these crimes. We continue to encourage prevention, reporting, investigation, and prosecution of these criminal behaviors to our fullest extent. Through rigorous implementation of the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military (IRC-SAM)'s recommendations as approved by the Secretary of Defense, we are striving to increase prevention and stop sexual assaults before they occur. We will also remain steadfast in holding perpetrators appropriately accountable for their crimes, and commanders and senior enlisted leaders for the climate of their unit.

We aim to identify and prevent harmful behaviors by training and educating Marines from a holistic wellness approach of mental, physical, spiritual, and social influence through the Marine Corps Total Force Fitness Program. SAPR services have also been expanded to victims of sexual harassment.

We continue to professionalize the SAPR workforce by hiring full-time employees in support of the approved IRC-SAM recommendations and prevention efforts. The Marine Corps implementation plan includes more than 350 new civilian hires in FY24, and a total of over 800 positions hired by FY27 across multiple prevention and response programs. This workforce expansion builds upon the Prevention Plan of Action. Hiring this number of personnel has illustrated the need for additional staffing for Human Resources Offices and methods to expedite the federal hiring process. The remote location of several Marine Corps installations adds to the challenge in hiring these professionals. We appreciate Congress' support as we continue these efforts.

As of December 2023, the Office of the Special Trial Counsel is fully staffed and operational worldwide. This office will professionalize prosecution of special victim offenses and strengthen victims' confidence in the military justice system by enabling independent special trial counsel to assume prosecutorial discretion over sexual assault, domestic violence, and other covered offenses. Beyond our accountability efforts, we have implemented a modernized and targeted training approach, particularly at entry-level training, to ensure all Marines are educated on standards of respect and care for their fellow Marines.

## **Suicide Prevention**

The loss of a Marine to suicide hurts deeply. The Marine Corps continues efforts to reduce suicides through recent Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee (SPRIRC) recommendations, implementation of Marine Corps Total Fitness concept, and with our integrated and comprehensive efforts across four prevention lines of effort.

Prevention & Skill-building. Unit Marine Awareness and Prevention Integrated Training (UMAPIT) and Operational Stress Control and Readiness training focus on primary prevention and early intervention basics. The Prevention in Action training for leaders and stakeholders provides a comprehensive approach to prevention. We seek enhanced coping and resiliency skills through stress identification and mitigation, positive psychology informed approaches to relationships and parenting, and peer-to-peer mentorship.

Application of Data & Research. An internal review board continues to identify key themes and provide actionable information. The data indicates that age, relationship distress, substance misuse, and access to lethal means are the most frequently observed factors among Marines. Based on these findings, the Marine Corps has worked to amplify Marines' knowledge and skills that sustain healthy relationships. It is also essential to help Marines struggling with substance misuse as early as possible to get them the help needed.

Communication. The Marine Corps continues to develop tools and refine communication approaches to provide more resources in the hands of leaders and Marines at all levels. We are actively implementing Brandon Act features, which ensure Marines are educated on all options to seek care, including the option to voluntarily seek help through an officer or staff NCO supervisor and initiate a referral for a mental health evaluation. In alignment with national strategies, messaging promotes and reinforces help-seeking and self-improvement, while reducing stigma. Our focus is on exposing Marines and families to available services to help navigate the stressors of life, supporting command and leadership, and encouraging positive resolution of conflict – both internal and external. An integrated prevention approach is our vision – newly released policy, resources, and new Suicide Prevention Program Coordinators are streamlining communication and outreach.

Collaboration. The Marine Corps synchronizes with Navy mental health services regularly to improve access to care and seamless transitions between services. Building on lessons learned through our implementation of IRC-SAM recommendations as approved by the Secretary of Defense, we are implementing Prevention Plan of Action 2.0, which integrates prevention of harmful behaviors linked to suicide risk, sexual assault, and other harmful behaviors. The holistic approach of Prevent Plan of

Action 2.0 will allow an overall wellness strategy that will measurably improve outcomes in concert with Marine Corps Total Fitness.

As we strive to reduce suicides, it is important to acknowledge that even with full access to help decided not to pursue it. Part of our effort will always be to get every Marine to use the care and services offered – and we need to make sure that mental health care is easily accessible. Compounding issues like nation-wide shortages of healthcare personnel and providers have created a significant problem for accessing healthcare, especially in more remote locations like Okinawa or Twentynine Palms, which impacts operational readiness. We recognize this as a problem that needs constant attention, assessment, and action.

### **CONCLUSION**

Our highest priority and primary objective remain recruiting, developing, and retaining elite warriors in the highest state of combat readiness to support and defend this great nation. Every recruiting, retention, and talent management initiative that we undertake must demonstrably and logically contribute to readiness and lethality.

The challenges to accomplishing recruiting, retention, and talent management goals are known. We continue to recruit the best of our nation's youth to serve and incentivize the call to service to sustain our warfighting ethos and excellence, culture of performance and belonging. We must do so in an environment that has shown declining propensity and eligibility to serve. Our measure of success is a Marine Corps with improved performance and lethality in combat which enables us to fulfill your Congressional mandate to be 'most ready when the nation is least ready,' today and on the battlefields of the future. Today, we stand ready to do exactly that.

Semper Fidelis.