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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

**STATEMENT**  
**OF**  
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**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**  
**BEFORE THE**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL**  
**OF THE**  
**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
**CONCERNING**  
**PERSONNEL POSTURE**  
**ON**  
**29 MARCH 2023**

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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.

## **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. The relationship with Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA), however, is close and collaborative, evidenced by our presence in the same facility.

The officer and prior service recruiting missions for the Marine Corps continue to be successful; however, the Marine Corps is facing enlisted recruiting challenges that have been highlighted previously. As we approach the 50th anniversary 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 a desirable pathway to greater opportunities – both in and out of uniform – but it is apparent that this is no longer widely understood and appreciated by our Nation’s youth. We must collectively ensure the health of our All-Volunteer Force and the strategic advantage it provides –talent, capability, and war-fighting excellence. The Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) remains committed to providing necessary resources and the highest-caliber Marine recruiters to achieve the accession mission while sustaining quality and standards. This is the bedrock of successful Marine Corps recruiting. We have increased funding for recruiting and surged our recruiting force. We continue to have recruiters assigned to every zip code in the Nation and are opening new recruiting stations nationwide.

The good news is that our officer recruiting remains strong. By every metric, including diversity, the quantity and quality of officer candidates is exceptional. Our non-prior service enlisted mission challenges remain. These are exacerbated by our historically low start pool of 29%, which is almost half of our traditional target of 53%. While we continue to make the shipping mission, the contracting power has yet to rebuild momentum and grow the start pool for FY24. The Marine Corps elected to reduce its planned active component end-strength in order to set conditions, maintain quality, and minimize most direct shipping requirements to enable the recruiting force to build the foundational programs, which were negatively impacted for two years due to COVID restrictions and an inability to access people in their communities.

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

Sustaining Quality. The quality of your enlisted Marines remains exceptionally high, and we will never sacrifice this quality. The Department of Defense (DOD) requires 90% of enlistees to have a high school diploma or equivalent (Education Tier 1) and 60% of enlistees to score in the Mental Groups I-III A (mental aptitude). Thus far this year, the Marine Corps achieved 98% for Education Tier 1 and over 65% for Mental Group I-III A. We continue to reach out to all our Nation's youth to find tomorrow's Marines, and vital to this success is assigning our best Marines to recruiting duty. Our recruiters closely reflect the face of the Nation, which is a testament to our intentional efforts to recruit a diverse force. Approximately 47% of our recruiters represent a minority demographic, well above our Nation's demographics. We connect with all communities by assigning Marines to cover every zip code in our Nation and we are constantly striving to reach all qualified youth and their influencers – from the most

rural small towns to the largest cities.

Continuum of Training. Training is MCRC's top priority. In the near term, we are modernizing MCRC's curriculum and updating its foundational training courses. These courses set and maintain essential recruiting skills and provide our Marines with the most current, relevant, and effective training to ensure that they are prepared for their assigned roles and responsibilities.

Expanding Markets. This approach continues to benefit recruiting efforts across the board. Over the past decade, racially/ethnically diverse enlisted accessions increased from 33% to 52%, and the same category of officer accessions more than doubled from 16% to 35%. Though impacted by COVID in FY20 and 21, enlisted female accessions remain steady at 9%, and female officer accessions have nearly doubled to 15%.

Adapting Advertising. The Marine Corps advertising program is essential to building awareness among high-quality, diverse populations that are increasingly disconnected from military service. A strong advertising program enables our recruiting command to modernize communication while attracting and engaging the highest-quality accession cohorts. Advertising funds repay many times over, as they produce lower first-term attrition, higher quality Marines, and increased readiness. In many cases, however, an increasingly fragmented media environment and media inflation rates approaching 20% have made maintaining program success exceptionally difficult. Robust and sustained advertising funding is essential, now more than ever.

## Where We Need Assistance

National Dialogue on Service. Those who have served in uniform depart our ranks with professionalism, maturity, leadership, and skills that translate well into the civilian workforce. Our veterans serve ably in industries, commercial sectors, and government across our Nation, bringing enhanced leadership and an exceptional work ethos back to their communities. However, messaging about service to our country competes within a crowded and fragmented media environment – which often offers a different story. We must challenge the misconceptions about military service. For example, surveys show that perceived physical risks associated with military service lead youth to view military service as “plan B” rather than an aspiration. Fifty-seven percent of youth polled believe that service members will have some form of psychological or emotional problem upon exiting service, and almost half think that they will have a physical injury or difficulty readjusting to everyday life. We must converge at the highest levels 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.

Modernization of our Advertising Tools. We appreciate the new pilot program authority from Congress in the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that allows us to update and improve how we advertise. We have plans to leverage this new authority and are coordinating with DOD to optimize our advertising and media presence.

Access to High Schools. We also thank Congress for its continued support for recruiter access to high schools, community colleges, and student directory lists. This access remains critical to recruiting high-quality applicants. Without it, our recruiters would lose the most

efficient and productive means of conveying military service opportunities to a diverse audience. Maintaining access to high schools and student directories remains a top priority for ensuring continued success of the ‘all-recruited force.’

## **RETENTION**

Marine Corps retention is at an inspiring point in its history. As a result of Force Design 2030 – and before the COVID pandemic hit – we shifted from a “recruit and replace” to an “invest and retain” model with immediate positive results. To be clear, although our recruiting conditions are challenging, once your Marines become Marines, they want to “stay Marine.” We exceeded our retention goals in FY22 and have already done so again in FY23, resulting in a more mature force with enhanced war-fighting capability. Despite these successes, the retention environment is competitive. We continue to have challenges retaining certain communities, like aviation, cyber, and some of our intelligence specialties. These are the same Marines we need to retain due to the significant high up-front investment and the unique capabilities they provide. To retain these highly skilled Marines, we need continued support from Congress – especially this Subcommittee - for the flexible incentives and special pays you have provided in the past. The current and future environment 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.

### **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, and necessary in support of the Marine Corps’ mission. Incentive pays remain vital to this effort. Selective

Reenlistment Bonuses allow us to shape the career force by targeting critical military occupational specialties and supporting lateral movement of Marines to these billets.

In FY22, we implemented programs as part of the retention campaign designed to encourage reenlistment at the unit level as well as to accelerate growth in specific Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs) that are emphasized in support of Force Design 2030. The Aviation Bonus, for example, assists in retaining aviation expertise, a critical skill that is more cost effective to retain than to produce in the number of skilled and experienced personnel required. Thank you for authorizing the incentives and special pays we use to target specific MOSs, skills, and assignments, including those aimed at retaining those Marines with high demand skills such as cyber.

For FY23, 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. Three efforts are noteworthy in this regard. First, we expanded non-monetary incentives—like the duty station incentive—to not only take care of Marines and their families, but also to ensure that Marines are in the right place to best support the Service. Second, we built on the success of efforts like the Early Reenlistment Authority, which provides the opportunity for Marines to reenlist earlier than they traditionally would have. Third, we leveraged the Commandant's Retention Program as one of our latest non-monetary efforts to retain high-performing Marines. These Marines can reenlist through a streamlined process and receive “front-of-the-line” access for assignment preference.

### **Compensation**

Military pay is a critical component of retention. Basic pay and accompanying benefits, such as housing and medical care, are competitive. However, inflation impacts the value of

military pay, as gas, food, and other costs have risen. We appreciate the 4.6% pay raise last year - and the 5.2% increase the Department submitted for this year - and Congress' passage of the Basic Needs Allowance (BNA). However, the sensitivity of Marine and families to economic fluctuations is evidence that pay and compensation is narrowly balanced. We continue to collaborate with the Department of the Navy and the Office of the Secretary of Defense on economic security issues to ensure the well-being of Marines and their families.

With respect to retirement, we remain agile with the Blended Retirement System (BRS) implementation. We have taken action to increase the BRS continuation pay multipliers to support our broader retention objectives. In January 2023, the Marine Corps doubled the continuation pay multiplier for active and reserve Marines. Continuation pay is offered to Marines at 12 years of service and the multiplier increase signals to them that their continued service is valued. We will continue to closely monitor continuation pay and adjust as needed.

### **Medical Care**

In addition to compensation, the other area highlighted by Marines and families as a factor in their career decision is access to high-quality health care. 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.

### **TALENT MANAGEMENT 2030**

Talent Management 2030 (TM2030) describes a fundamental redesign of our personnel system to maximize the number of fully trained, qualified, experienced, and deployable Marines in the operational forces. The overarching goal is to increase Marine Corps combat capability and sustain our ability to remain the Nation's premier expeditionary force-in-readiness. TM2030



requires that we recruit and retain talent, modernize the assignment process consistent with our war-fighting philosophy, introduce new measures to increase career flexibility, and use modern digital tools, processes, and analytics, with transparency. Throughout this redesign, we remain committed to our time-tested standards and the fact that the title Marine is hard-earned. We honor our commitment as new Marines arrive in operational units expecting meaningful and challenging training and a culture of professionalism, pride, mutual trust, and respect.

Much like the overarching approach to Force Design 2030, TM2030 is a multi-year effort – a service-wide strategic design process that we are executing. Some of our promising talent management initiatives include:

- Commandant's Retention Program offers pre-approved reenlistments to top-performing Marines by streamlining the process and giving priority access to duty station and assignment options. Last year, it resulted in a 72% increase of first-term reenlistment submissions by high-performing Marines with the average reenlistment approval accomplished in 24 to 48 hours, a marked improvement in processing times over previous years.
- Staff Non-Commissioned Officer (SNCO) Promotion Board Realignment realigns promotion boards to better sequence the assignments 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%, reducing the number of involuntarily screened Marines by 38%.

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. The overarching goal of MCOSM is to align a Marine's interests and skills to leverage their talents to improve performance, increase their satisfaction, and positively influence their retention decision.

- Retention Prediction Network (RPN). We are 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 Johns Hopkins University's Applied Physics Lab that harnessed vast quantities of manpower data to provide data-informed talent management decisions. The objective is to better recruit individuals with attributes disposed to becoming Marines.
- Talent Marketplace. Our Talent Management Engagement Portal (TMEP) will modernize the current assignments system with a transparent, data-based environment that allows Marines, commands, and the duty assignments professionals to collaborate on the assignments process. At full integration, 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 popularity, 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, another assignment of significant value to the Marine Corps, or a career progression requirement delayed by the assignment or education. We implemented this authority in CY22 and will continue to assess program efficacy and measure the impacts on the deliberate development of our leaders.
- Virtual Boards. Our Enlisted Career Retention Boards (ECRBs) ensure the Service retains the very best and most qualified Marines in competitive occupational specialties. These boards consist of voting members from the active-duty force virtually from around the globe. In FY22, we expanded the virtual boards, and further improved the board process with the release of Digital Boardroom 2.0, a cloud-based application that increases the fidelity and accuracy of the information presented to board members.
- Active and Reserve Permeability. We hear repeatedly from Marines and families the desire for career flexibility. We are currently exploring ways to increase permeability between the active and reserve components through a talent management operational planning team. Once we identify some potential improvements, we will work determine if legislative proposals could address this issue.

Our talent management success is dependent on modern technology systems. We have been working toward modernizing our 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 more systems, services, and databases are migrated to cloud-based applications, we will be able to engage in wide ranging optimization and be postured to capitalize on the promise of artificial intelligence and machine learning. These cloud-based, mobile-device accessible tools are the norm in the private sector and the same must be true in the Marine Corps soon. 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.” Software development and acquisition need to be measured in weeks and months, rather than years. Our goal is to have modern technology with significantly increased capabilities to enable the management of Marines’ careers.

### **Diversity**

To remain the most ready and most lethal force, we continue to capitalize on the knowledge, skills, abilities, performance, and potential of every Marine. Our strategic plan operationalizes Marine Corps efforts to enhance combat effectiveness within our formations by providing framework to align efforts. Since 2009, racially/ethnically diverse enlisted accessions have increased by 41%, and racially/ethnically diverse officer accessions have more than doubled. Over the same period, female officer accessions have also doubled. Women serving in combat arms units are also on the rise, increasing 11% from last year; women in combat arms MOS have increased 26% since last year, including the first female Reconnaissance Marine. Currently, nearly 20% of Brigadier Generals and Brigadier General-selects are females or minorities.

## TAKING CARE OF MARINES AND THEIR FAMILIES

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

### Family Support

Permanent Change of Station (PCS) Flexibility. In the past year, CMC's guidance to improve stability for units and reduce the stress placed on our families has been implemented. PCS moves, while essential, are often disruptive to Marines and their families. Since 2016, we have worked to reduce PCS moves by using Permanent Change of Assignment (PCA) orders more often. PCA are local moves where a Marine changes unit, but remains in the same geographic location, thus reducing disruption to operations, personnel, and families. Through TM2030, we seek to further increase PCS flexibility, balancing it with both the needs of the individual Marine's career, their family, and the Service.

Parental Leave. As authorized by the FY22 National Defense Authorization Act, Marines who become parents from a birth event, adoption, placement for adoption, or placement for long-term foster care are authorized 12 weeks of parental leave. The goal of this flexibility is to support new parents and, ultimately, enhance retention.

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. We currently have waitlists totaling approximately 1,400 children, primarily at Camp Pendleton, Hawaii, Quantico, and Camp

Lejeune/New River. The waitlists are caused by a variety of factors, such as a shortage of qualified workers, a lengthy hiring process and facilities under renovation. An exacerbating factor is that 40 percent of Marine families on a waitlist whom we contact to offer a childcare spot, decline it, and choose instead to remain on the waitlist, primarily due to COVID concerns and enhanced telework. This inhibits our ability to reduce the waitlist.

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 Fiscal Year 2023 through 2027 to hire more employees at increased wages to help retain a professional workforce. We have also increased salaries of direct care employees, who were also offered priority placement and a childcare fee discount. We will build two new child development centers beginning in 2024, one at Camp Pendleton and the other at Quantico. We also offer childcare fee assistance for eligible Marines who are assigned to an installation that has a significant waitlist. In FY22, nearly 1,400 children were enrolled in the fee assistance program at a total cost of over \$6.1 million. We appreciate the funding and support Congress – and this Subcommittee - has provided in recent years to improve childcare delivery.

Spouse Employment. Spouse employment is a concern for many Marine Corps families and can be a significant factor in their financial security and readiness. Our 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. Marine spouses are also supported by DoD's Spouse Employment and Career Opportunities Office. We also

have a transfer process in place that makes it easier for military spouses working in a CDC to transfer to an open position in the CDC at their next duty station. We are also able to reimburse Marine spouses up to \$1,000 for state licensure and certification costs arising from relocation to another state. Here, again, we appreciate Congress' support and respectfully request it continue.

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

The Marine Corps is fully engaged in implementing the recommendations of the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military (IRC) as approved by the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF). We will remain steadfast in holding perpetrators accountable for their harmful behaviors and crimes. Commanders and senior enlisted leaders are increasingly aware of, and focused on, the climate of their unit. The Marine Corps is moving with diligence to implement prevention actions including improvements to training, programs, policies, and the development of the new and existing workforce as outlined in the IRC's recommendations, as approved by the SECDEF. We are enhancing the "No Wrong Door" policy across Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR), Sexual Harassment, and Family Advocacy Program by formalizing policies, protocols, and updated personnel training, to include the USMC 40-hour Initial SAPR Victim Advocate Training. SAPR services have also been expanded to cover Marines who have experienced sexual harassment.

An early challenge with implementation of the approved IRC recommendations is hiring qualified professionals for these high-demand positions. The Marine Corps implementation plan includes more than 350 new civilian hires in FY23, and a total of over 800 positions hired by FY27 across multiple prevention and response programs. This workforce expansion builds on the Prevention Plan of Action 2.0, which began in FY22. 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. While executing hiring actions, the Marine Corps is updating all training associated with sexual assault and prevention, as well as releasing a Service-specific prevention training for uniformed and civilian leaders to enhance implementation of prevention efforts and influence healthy behaviors across all ranks.

### **Suicide Prevention**

The loss of a one Marine to suicide hurts deeply. The Marine Corps initiated review of the recent IRC recommendations, as we continue efforts to reduce suicides by focusing on integrated and comprehensive efforts across our 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. Through stress identification and mitigation, positive psychology informed approaches to relationships and parenting, and peer-to-peer mentorship, we seek enhanced coping and resiliency skills.

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 and promote connectedness. It is also essential to help Marines struggling with substance misuse as early as possible to get them the help needed to end their misuse before it potentially becomes a factor in other harmful behaviors.

Communication. The Marine Corps continues to develop tools and refine communication approaches to get more resources in the hands of leaders of all levels. In alignment with national strategies (NDAA, DSPO and the White House National Strategy to Reduce Military and Veteran Suicide), messaging promotes and reinforces help-seeking and self-improvement, while reducing stigma. The focus is on exposing Marines and families to accessing available services to help navigate the stressors of life, support command and leadership, and encourage positive resolution of conflict – both internal and external. An integrated prevention approach is our vision, and newly released policy and resources and new Suicide Prevention Program Coordinators streamline communication and outreach.

Collaboration. The Marine Corps synchronizes with Navy mental-health services regularly to improve access to care and seamless transitions between services. Concurrently, collaborations with SAPR include Prevention Plan of Action 2.0, which integrates prevention of harmful behaviors.

As we continue toward reducing suicides, it is important to acknowledge that too often a Marine with access to help declined to pursue it. Part of our efforts is, and must continue to 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. In this vein, the current military health system transformation has not met current needs, which has resulted in degraded services that impact prevention. Compounding issues like nation-wide shortages of all types 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 resolution quickly.

## **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 our great Nation. Every recruiting, retention, and talent management initiative that we undertake must demonstrably and logically contribute to this objective and enable the capabilities and capacities of Force Design to be realized as quickly as possible.

The challenges to accomplishing our recruiting, retention, and talent management goals are known. We must continue to recruit the best of our Nation's youth to serve, and we must do so in an environment that has shown shrinking propensity and eligibility to serve, exacerbated by industrial age limitations to recruiter outreach and rising costs of advertising. These challenges are why we need to have a sustained presence in every sector of our diverse Nation. Our measure of success is a Marine Corps with improved performance and lethality in combat, which enables us to fulfill our Congressional mandate to be 'most ready when the Nation is least ready, 'today and on the battlefields of the future.

Semper Fidelis.