

Prepared Statement

of

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Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Armed Forces

Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today to discuss the Department of Defense's greatest strength – our people. Current diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) efforts are fundamentally about supporting our people across the Total Force. From recruiting and retention, to unit cohesion, DEIA efforts are essential to ensuring military readiness. Today's Total Force is a living testament to the Department's decades long leadership on military equal opportunity policies.

Recruiting and Retention

The diversity of the U.S. Armed Forces is one of its greatest strengths. We want our Forces to look like our nation and reflect what is best about our citizens. To say our people matter is to recognize that we must pursue specific, purposeful strategies that leverage the strengths of all Americans. Talent pulled from diverse backgrounds amplifies innovative thought and will drive innovative solutions to the complex problems presented in warfighting and defending our national security. This is not only about demographics, but also includes diversity of thought, talent, knowledge, skills, and experience. With a historically low propensity to serve among American youth, it is more important than ever that the Department of Defense and the Military Services are clear about what we offer: training, career mobility, and financial benefits in addition to community, connection, and a common purpose. Given current recruiting challenges, our outreach efforts are designed to stretch beyond the traditional populations that are most likely to serve. To do this we developed and are implementing strategies to better communicate to all Americans the importance of service. Outreach methods that demonstrate the value we place on recruits as individuals, supportive of the collective mission of lethality, hold increased potential.

But data also tell us the concerns young Americans have about safety are negatively impacting recruiting. If a recruit or Service member does not feel safe reporting to work for fear of discrimination, that is a problem we must address for the individual, for the military unit, and for the success of the Department's mission. These concerns are fundamental to the Department's current DEIA efforts. With retention rates at historic highs, we are confident our efforts are sending the right message.

This year marked a significant milestone for the Department of Defense – the 50th anniversary of the All-Volunteer Force. When our nation no longer utilized the draft, there was no guarantee of the success for our All-Volunteer Force or the story it would create - the most educated, professional, and capable military in history. The Department has learned plenty over the past fifty years. As we look forward to the next fifty, it is imperative that we do not take for granted what makes the U.S. Military unmatched – the 2.3 million Active and Reserve Component Service members and over 900 thousand DoD civilians, along with their families, caregivers, and survivors, who come from every corner of the nation and represent the varied experiences and backgrounds that stitch together the extraordinary national fabric of America. This includes over 40 percent who identify as members of minority groups.

Unit Cohesion

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are essential to unit cohesion and trust. To achieve unit cohesion – the bedrocks of a modern, ready, and lethal Total Force –our Service members must be ready to act as one. To build a Force that reflects our Nation's diversity, where all can serve with dignity and respect requires continuous attention. A failure to leverage the strengths of our people – including failures to end discrimination, or other toxic behaviors whether overt or covert – undercuts unit cohesion necessary for Forces to train and fight as one,

and to deter and defeat adversaries. Regardless of whether inappropriate actions are isolated instances or systemic patterns, each can damage morale, trust, and cohesion critical for a unit to work and fight effectively. Consequently, our current DEIA efforts are designed to identify potential inappropriate actions and address those actions that undercuts our ability to generate cohesive units.

DEI Efforts as a Force Multiplier

Diversity across our Total Force will provide the strength needed to deter war and win in combat. With the Department's priority mission to provide a combat-credible Force, we must prioritize a force that is lethal, resilient, and reflective of America's diversity. Diversity that is reflected in skills, experience, and expertise of each Service member will provide and enhance the strength needed to win in combat. Diversity of thought builds a Joint Force more prepared to manage the strategic environment of complex, global battlefields. Talent pulled from diverse backgrounds across the country will amplify innovative solutions across the complex challenges the Department faces. That means everyone -- regardless of race, sex, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion -- who can meet the Department's high standards, should have the opportunity to serve with dignity and respect. As Secretary Austin frequently notes, diversity is our strength.

DEI Efforts Over the Years

Our efforts today are not new. Diversity and inclusion missions have been widely supported by administrations and political leaders of both political parties for decades. Seventy-five years ago, President Harry Truman signed the *Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948*, formally allowing women to serve in the military after more than a century of supporting

our Services. That same year, he signed Executive Order 9981 to desegregate the Armed Forces. The Civil Rights movement catalyzed military leaders to insist that race relations education be provided to every member of the Armed Forces by the early 1970s. In the decades since, the Department expanded on those monumental steps and built the world's most lethal fighting force composed of a diverse, highly skilled military and civilian workforce.

Drawing on a similar historic parallel to the action taken during the Civil Rights Era, in the summer of 2020, then-Secretary of Defense Mark Esper directed immediate actions to address DEI opportunities across the Department. He established the DoD Board on Diversity and Inclusion, which made comprehensive recommendations on recruitment, accessions, and strategies to retain and propel into leadership more diverse candidates to advance into leadership roles; ideas to address climate and culture challenges that create barriers for racial and ethnic groups in the workplace and to improve advancement opportunities; and ordered the creation of the Defense Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion as a standing, independent body to make recommendations to strengthen the Department.^{1,2}

Congress has also been a strong partner in recent DEI efforts. The William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, which passed with bipartisan supermajorities in both the House and Senate, contained groundbreaking DEI provisions, which I am now diligently working to implement. These include creation of the DoD Chief Diversity Officer position, a position I am proud to be the first to hold, as well as a Senior Advisor for Diversity and Inclusion within each Military Department. Additional requirements included creation of a diversity strategic plan and the incorporation of strategic goals related to

¹ https://media.defense.gov/2020/Jul/15/2002457268/-1/-1/1/Immediate_Actions_to_Address_Diversity_Inclusion_Equal_Opportunity_in_Military_Services.pdf

² <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Jun/22/2002319394/-1/-1/1/ACTIONS-FOR-IMPROVING-DIVERSITY-AND-INCLUSION-IN-THE-DOD.PDF>

diversity and inclusion in the Armed Forces within the National Defense Strategy, and the establishment of a Deputy Inspector General to provide oversight of diversity and inclusion in the Department.

Current Initiatives and Positive Developments

The Department has made progress in aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. For example, current demographics of enlisted Service members reflect clear progress in a force more representative of our nation's total population. Recent initiatives ensure that all military members have an equal opportunity to succeed include removing photographs and references to race, ethnicity, and gender from personnel files in promotion and selection processes; enacting stronger protections against harassment and discrimination; and reviewing hairstyles and grooming policies to ensure that all service members can exercise religious freedoms.

Yet, other areas require continued efforts. Our military is strongest when its senior leaders have diverse experiences and perspectives to bring to bear to our most pressing challenges. At our senior levels, challenges still remain in achieving that diversity. We must maintain a strong pipeline of diverse candidates. In line with our National Defense Strategy, we are recruiting and training a workforce with the skills and abilities to creatively solve national security challenges in a complex global environment. By building a diverse cohort of young, talented, and driven Service members, we hope to see their accession up the chain of command and eventual placement in the highest ranks of leadership.

Recently, we implemented talent management sprints to test promising initiatives to remove barriers and increase opportunity across the career lifecycle. We expanded ROTC

preparatory and Military Service Academy nomination programs to access a broader pool for officer commissioning opportunities. We are studying diversity across the Department to better understand disparities in representation and barriers to career advancement for Service members and civilians. Similarly, we continue to evaluate potential disparities to better understand the experiences of all service members, including Black Service members and members of other racial/ethnic groups and their families, as we are work with a federally funded research and development center to study these challenges. Further, we are enhancing partnerships and collaboration, including through the creation of the first university affiliated research center associated with, and led, by a Historically Black College/University. Finally, we are reviewing our talent management strategies and practices to better map diverse skills and experiences to mission requirements.

It is critical to dispel myths and misconceptions. Evidence exists that there are problems and our leaders must address these problems. For example, the Air Force’s Independent Racial Disparities Review (2020) produced survey results from 123,758 Total Force Personnel and 27,000 pages of feedback that show *“a substantial percentage of Black [Department of Air Force (DAF)] members believe racial bias exists in the DAF discipline and developmental opportunity processes.”* To be clear, I do not believe our military is systemically racist. Yet, we see problems – either by individuals or by what the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee called “permissive environments” – and we must address those problems both among individuals who act inappropriately and with leaders whose units fail to meet our expectations of good order and discipline.

Secretary Austin has emphasized that one of the Department’s top priorities is to ensure that all who seek to join this community and share in our common purpose, have the opportunity

to leverage their full potential and rise to the highest levels of responsibility in the Department. I am committed to working with you and this subcommittee to ensure that our Service members and civilian employees have every opportunity to succeed, contribute to the mission, and reach their full potential. Our commitment that the Department of Defense and Military Services are the model employers of choice is a critical message for young Americans who make up the future of our Force. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee, and I look forward to your questions.