

# ALWAYS READY: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A U.S. COAST GUARD SENTINEL

---

---

(118-72)

HEARING  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON  
TRANSPORTATION AND  
INFRASTRUCTURE  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

SEPTEMBER 25, 2024

Printed for the use of the  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure



Available online at: [https://www.govinfo.gov/committee/house-transportation?path=/  
browsecommittee/chamber/house/committee/transportation](https://www.govinfo.gov/committee/house-transportation?path=/browsecommittee/chamber/house/committee/transportation)

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

58-132 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2025

---

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Publishing Office  
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512-1800; DC area (202) 512-1800  
Fax: (202) 512-2104 Mail: Stop IDCC, Washington, DC 20402-0001

## COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

SAM GRAVES, Missouri, *Chairman*

RICK LARSEN, Washington, *Ranking Member*

ERIC A. "RICK" CRAWFORD, Arkansas	ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON, District of Columbia
DANIEL WEBSTER, Florida	GRACE F. NAPOLITANO, California
THOMAS MASSIE, Kentucky	STEVE COHEN, Tennessee
SCOTT PERRY, Pennsylvania	JOHN GARAMENDI, California
BRIAN BABIN, Texas	HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, JR., Georgia
GARRET GRAVES, Louisiana	ANDRÉ CARSON, Indiana
DAVID ROUZER, North Carolina	DINA TITUS, Nevada
MIKE BOST, Illinois	JARED HUFFMAN, California
DOUG LAMALFA, California	JULIA BROWNLEY, California
BRUCE WESTERMAN, Arkansas	FREDERICA S. WILSON, Florida
BRIAN J. MAST, Florida	MARK DESAULNIER, California
JENNIFFER GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN, Puerto Rico	SALUD O. CARBAJAL, California
PETE STAUBER, Minnesota	GREG STANTON, Arizona, <i>Vice Ranking Member</i>
TIM BURCHETT, Tennessee	COLIN Z. ALLRED, Texas
DUSTY JOHNSON, South Dakota	SHARICE DAVIDS, Kansas
JEFFERSON VAN DREW, New Jersey, <i>Vice Chairman</i>	JESÚS G. "CHUY" GARCÍA, Illinois
TROY E. NEHLS, Texas	CHRIS PAPPAS, New Hampshire
TRACEY MANN, Kansas	SETH MOULTON, Massachusetts
BURGESS OWENS, Utah	JAKE AUCHINCLOSS, Massachusetts
RUDY YAKYM III, Indiana	MARILYN STRICKLAND, Washington
LORI CHAVEZ-DEREMER, Oregon	TROY A. CARTER, Louisiana
THOMAS H. KEAN, JR., New Jersey	PATRICK RYAN, New York
ANTHONY D'ESPOSITO, New York	MARY SATTTLER PELTOLA, Alaska
ERIC BURLISON, Missouri	ROBERT MENENDEZ, New Jersey
DERRICK VAN ORDEN, Wisconsin	VAL T. HOYLE, Oregon
BRANDON WILLIAMS, New York	EMILIA STRONG SYKES, Ohio
MARCUS J. MOLINARO, New York	HILLARY J. SCHOLTEN, Michigan
MIKE COLLINS, Georgia	VALERIE P. FOUSHEE, North Carolina
MIKE EZELL, Mississippi	CHRISTOPHER R. DELUZZIO, Pennsylvania
JOHN S. DUARTE, California	
AARON BEAN, Florida	
CELESTE MALOY, Utah	
KEVIN KILEY, California	
VINCE FONG, California	

---

## SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

DANIEL WEBSTER, Florida, *Chairman*

SALUD O. CARBAJAL, California, *Ranking Member*

BRIAN BABIN, Texas	JOHN GARAMENDI, California
BRIAN J. MAST, Florida	CHRIS PAPPAS, New Hampshire
JENNIFFER GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN, Puerto Rico	JAKE AUCHINCLOSS, Massachusetts
JEFFERSON VAN DREW, New Jersey	MARY SATTTLER PELTOLA, Alaska
MIKE EZELL, Mississippi, <i>Vice Chairman</i>	HILLARY J. SCHOLTEN, Michigan, <i>Vice Ranking Member</i>
AARON BEAN, Florida	RICK LARSEN, Washington ( <i>Ex Officio</i> )
SAM GRAVES, Missouri ( <i>Ex Officio</i> )	

## CONTENTS

	Page
Summary of Subject Matter .....	v
STATEMENTS OF MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE	
Hon. Daniel Webster, a Representative in Congress from the State of Florida, and Chairman, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, opening statement .....	1
Prepared statement .....	3
Hon. Rick Larsen, a Representative in Congress from the State of Washington, and Ranking Member, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, opening statement .....	4
Prepared statement .....	5
Hon. Salud O. Carbajal, a Representative in Congress from the State of California, and Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, opening statement .....	7
Prepared statement .....	8
WITNESSES	
Vice Admiral Thomas G. Allan, Jr., Deputy Commandant for Mission Support, U.S. Coast Guard, oral statement .....	9
Prepared statement .....	11
Master Chief Heath B. Jones, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard, U.S. Coast Guard, oral statement <sup>†</sup> .....	14

---

<sup>†</sup>Master Chief Heath B. Jones did not submit a prepared statement for the record.





Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Sam Graves  
Chairman

Jack Raddy, Staff Director

Rick Larsen  
Ranking Member

Katherine W. Dedrick, Democratic Staff Director

SEPTEMBER 20, 2024

**SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER**

TO: Members, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation  
FROM: Staff, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation  
RE: Subcommittee Hearing on “*Always Ready: A Day in the Life of a U.S. Coast Guard Sentinel*”

I. PURPOSE

The Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure will meet on Wednesday, September 25, 2024, at 2:00 p.m. ET in 2167 Rayburn House Office Building to receive testimony at a hearing entitled, “*Always Ready: A Day in the Life of a U.S. Coast Guard Sentinel*.” The Subcommittee will hear testimony from Vice Admiral Thomas Allan Jr., Deputy Commandant for Mission Support, United States Coast Guard, and Master Chief Heath B. Jones, Master Chief Petty Officer of the United States Coast Guard. Additionally, at a Members lunch held at 1:00 p.m. ET in 2253 Rayburn House Building, the Subcommittee will hear from four United States Coast Guard (Coast Guard or Service) enlisted members who will talk about their experiences within the Service. These enlisted members will be available for questions and conversation during the lunch, but not during the hearing.

II. BACKGROUND

The Coast Guard has primary responsibility to “enforce or assist in the enforcement of all applicable Federal laws on, under, and over the high seas and waters subject to the jurisdiction of the United States; ensure the safety of life and property at sea; carry out domestic and international icebreaking activities; and maintain defense readiness to operate as a specialized service in the Navy upon the declaration of war or when the President directs.”<sup>1</sup> Coast Guard personnel are responsible for assisting mariners in distress, protecting and defending more than 100,000 miles of United States coastline and inland waterways, and safeguarding an economic region covering 4.5 million square miles.<sup>2</sup>

The Coast Guard offers 21 unique career opportunities for its enlisted recruits, including careers in aviation, cyber, afloat, intelligence, and Information Technology (IT).<sup>3</sup> Coast Guard Officers can enter numerous career paths, comprised of afloat,

<sup>1</sup> 14 U.S.C. § 102.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO-23-106750, COAST GUARD RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CHALLENGES PERSIST (May 2023), available at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-106750.pdf> [hereinafter Recruitment and Retention Report].

<sup>3</sup> UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Careers*, available at <https://www.gocoastguard.com/careers>.

aviation, engineering, healthcare, prevention, response, and support.<sup>4</sup> At every rank, Coast Guard servicemembers perform extraordinary tasks every day in their service to the Nation. Some examples include search and rescue operations in life threatening conditions, perilous high-speed drug interceptions, and supporting the United States scientific community through ice breaking operations in the most remote regions on Earth.<sup>5</sup>

However, historic funding shortfalls and recruitment challenges, particularly among enlisted personnel, continue to hinder the Service and limit its ability to carry out its 11 assigned statutory missions. In 2023, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that the 55,000 member Coast Guard was 4,800 members short (approximately eight percent shortfall) and that it had missed its recruiting targets for four fiscal years in a row.<sup>6</sup> While the Service is currently on track to meet its recruitment goals for 2024, significant manpower shortages still exist within the Service, leaving hundreds of critical billets and ratings unfilled.<sup>7</sup> However increased recruitment will only stop the bleeding, it will not help with addressing the existing shortfall.<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, the Service is reducing its capabilities by closing stations and laying up cutters to align the Coast Guard's force structure with its manpower realities.<sup>9</sup> In order to overcome such challenges, the Service must have the resources to make appropriate investments into both its personnel and the infrastructure that supports them.

### III. COAST GUARD PERSONNEL

#### *ENLISTED PERSONNEL*

Enlisted personnel in the Coast Guard range in rank from Seaman Recruit to Master Chief Petty Officer. Enlisted Service members make up the majority of Coast Guard personnel comprising approximately 82 percent of the Service and are the Coast Guard's main workforce.<sup>10</sup>

The sole accession point for all enlisted Coast Guard recruits is the United States Coast Guard Training Center Cape May (TRACEN Cape May), located in Cape May, New Jersey. TRACEN Cape May's facilities are nearing the point of total failure. Dilapidated infrastructure, crumbling foundations, and other serious structural issues have infiltrated many buildings.<sup>11</sup> Recurrent budget requests and appropriation shortfalls in shoreside infrastructure continue to exacerbate the decline. The Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2024 authorizes \$225 million for Fiscal Year 2025 and \$125 million for Fiscal Year 2026 to improve and modernize the facilities at TRACEN Cape May, and authorizes \$12 million to strengthen the Service's recruiting efforts.<sup>12</sup>

#### *COMMISSIONED PERSONNEL*

Commissioned officers in the Coast Guard can enter the Service through three programs: the Coast Guard Academy, Officer Candidate School, or as a Direct Commission Officer. All these programs are housed at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut, creating a similar sole accession point for all Officers.

Like TRACEN Cape May, the Coast Guard Academy has suffered from the Service's historic shoreside funding shortfalls. Crumbling infrastructure, mold, asbestos, and generally antiquated facilities hinder the Service's ability to acquire, recruit, and retain talent in its officer corps.<sup>13</sup> This is particularly true when competing with other Service Academies which possess updated and well-funded facilities, like West Point, the United States Naval Academy, or the United States Airforce Academy.

The Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2024 authorizes \$10 million in Fiscal Year 2025 to fund the creation of an infrastructure development plan for the Coast Guard

<sup>4</sup>*Id.*

<sup>5</sup>UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *About USCG*, available at <https://www.uscg.mil/About/Missions/>.

<sup>6</sup>Recruitment and Retention Report, *supra* note 2.

<sup>7</sup>Briefing provided by Capt. Jason Aleksak, United States Coast Guard, to H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure staff (Aug. 7, 2024).

<sup>8</sup>*Id.*

<sup>9</sup>*Id.*

<sup>10</sup>UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, MANPOWER REQUIREMENTS PLAN, (Mar. 9, 2023) (on file with Comm.).

<sup>11</sup>Briefing provided by Capt. Dorthy Hernandez, United States Coast Guard, to H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure staff (Mar. 22, 2023). [hereinafter Coast Guard Briefing]

<sup>12</sup>The Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2024, H.R. 7659, 118th Cong. (2024). [hereinafter H.R. 7659]

<sup>13</sup>Coast Guard Briefing, *supra* note 11.

Academy, and authorizes an additional \$100 million in Fiscal Year 2026 to execute this plan.<sup>14</sup>

#### IV. MAJOR ISSUES FACED BY COAST GUARD PERSONNEL

In May, during the Coast Guard Congressional breakfast, the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard highlighted that members prioritize the housing, access to health and support services, childcare, and schools. These four issues play a pivotal role in recruiting and retention, but are also areas where the Coast Guard has historically struggled to perform well.

##### *AVAILABILITY OF HOUSING*

Approximately 41 percent of Coast Guard units can be found in some of the most remote and most expensive locations within the United States.<sup>15</sup> This includes summer vacation communities where housing is only seasonal or prohibitively expensive. While there are some locations where the Coast Guard provides and maintains housing, the maintenance and upkeep of this housing is often underfunded, creating issues related to lead, mold, or other health concerns.<sup>16</sup> For many in the Coast Guard, affordable housing is nearly impossible to find. Compounding the issue, the Coast Guard has not conducted a Service-wide survey of members on their housing experiences and challenges since 2012, resulting in inaccurate and out of date data, hindering the Service's ability to make impactful and informed investments into personnel housing.<sup>17</sup>

The Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2024 requires that the Commandant produce to the Committee an implementation plan to incorporate the recommendations made in GAO's 2024 report on improving Coast Guard housing.<sup>18</sup>

##### *ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE*

The Coast Guard offers outpatient medical services for its personnel at shore-based outpatient clinics and sickbays, as well as limited services at sickbays that are on Coast Guard vessels. Coast Guard personnel may also obtain medical care through the Department of Defense's (DOD) regional health plan, TRICARE, which is administered by the Defense Health Agency (DHA). Through TRICARE, Coast Guard personnel can obtain medical care from military hospitals and clinics or through civilian health care providers.<sup>19</sup> Importantly, Coast Guard active duty personnel and their dependents are more than twice as likely than the personnel and dependents from the other military services to be enrolled in TRICARE Prime Remote, which means they are located more than 50 miles away from a military hospital or clinic.<sup>20</sup> This further highlights the challenges that the Service's remote postings have on its personnel.

Challenges, such as clinic staffing shortages, have previously limited the Coast Guard's ability to provide health care to its personnel. Furthermore, as is the case with housing, the remote nature of many Coast Guard bases limits the availability of health care to many members within the service.<sup>21</sup>

In 2021, the Coast Guard began experimenting with telehealth options during the COVID-19 pandemic, expanding to a pilot video telehealth platform in 2022 and full deployment in September 2023. As of December 2023, the Coast Guard is in the process of formalizing its telehealth program, which includes establishing standardized scheduling practices for telehealth appointments and monitoring related metrics by the end of Fiscal Year 2024.<sup>22</sup> However, IT issues, most notably issues pertaining to inconsistent internet connectivity at sea and in remote locations, have plagued the performance of the telehealth program.<sup>23</sup>

##### *ACCESS TO SCHOOL*

Access to quality education and childcare is often prohibitively expensive or unavailable in more remote communities where Coast Guard personnel are stationed.

<sup>14</sup> H.R. 7659, *supra* note 12.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO-24-106388, BETTER FEEDBACK COLLECTION AND INFORMATION COULD ENHANCE HOUSING PROGRAM (Feb. 2024).

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> H.R. 7659, *supra* note 12.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO-24-106784, COAST GUARD HEALTH CARE: INFORMATION ON TELEHEALTH USAGE, (Apr. 2024). [hereinafter Telehealth Report].

<sup>20</sup> Recruitment and Retention Report, *supra* note 2.

<sup>21</sup> Telehealth Report, *supra* note 19.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

Military families frequently cited education issues for their children as a drawback to military service, because children may have to transfer schools up to nine times, on average, before high school graduation.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, military families often rely on public schools, based on where they live, and fewer choices are available to families in rural areas.<sup>25</sup> GAO found that in rural areas fewer public schools and fewer types of school options, including charter and magnet schools, were available compared to units in more highly populated urban areas.<sup>26</sup> For example, in one study rural Coast Guard units had a median of 32 schools located nearby, while urban units had a median of 186 schools nearby.<sup>27</sup> Limitations in educational opportunities hinders the Service's ability to retain personnel.

#### ACCESS TO CHILDCARE

In 2020, the rising cost of child care nationwide was among the most formidable challenges facing Coast Guard families.<sup>28</sup> The Coast Guard operates proportionally fewer on-base child development centers compared to other military services, so most eligible Coast Guard personnel receive fee assistance to help them obtain childcare through community-based providers.<sup>29</sup> The Coast Guard's nine existing facilities can only provide on-base care to approximately 700 children.<sup>30</sup> In 2022, 300 children were on the waitlist for Coast Guard facilities.<sup>31</sup> The Coast Guard serves the other 82 percent of enrolled children through community-based providers who participate in the Service's Fee Assistance program.<sup>32</sup> Comparatively, the Department of Defense is able to serve 77 percent of enrolled children in its own on-base child development centers, limiting their reliance on outside providers.<sup>33</sup> The Coast Guard has attempted to address this shortfall by building four new child development centers.<sup>34</sup> It has also centralized and updated online information to help families find child care in their communities.<sup>35</sup>

The reliance on community-based providers has consequences for Coast Guard Personnel. In remote areas, there may not be sufficient community providers available, or the wait list is exceedingly long, and since members are often only informed of a new duty station months before transfer, there may not be sufficient time to apply and be accepted.

Even on-base child development centers face difficulties in recruiting and certifying childcare providers. For example, in late June, Coast Guard Base Kodiak informed 16 families that due to staffing shortages, their dependents would be disenrolled from the on base Child Development Center.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, it could not accommodate enrollment for inbound members.<sup>37</sup> This notification was made at the height of summer, when families were moving to or from the Coast Guard base at Kodiak, Alaska, and needed reliable childcare. Despite its large size, even Base Kodiak could not provide adequate childcare for its members. This difficulty is further heightened because Kodiak is a remote island, with limited childcare options.

#### SUMMARY

While all branches of the military face recruiting and retention challenges, due to its small size the Coast Guard feels any shortfalls more acutely. Moreover, it can be particularly challenging for the Coast Guard to recruit because it is smaller, less well known, and less well funded than the other military services.<sup>38</sup> As highlighted by the stories of the enlisted members during the Members lunch, the Coast Guard workforce is vital to accomplishing the 11 statutory missions and safeguard the National security of the United States.

<sup>24</sup> Recruitment and Retention Report, *supra* note 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

<sup>29</sup> U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO-22-105262, MILITARY CHILDCARE: COAST GUARD IS TAKING STEPS TO INCREASE ACCESS FOR FAMILIES (June 2022), available at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-105262> [hereinafter Childcare Report].

<sup>30</sup> Recruitment and Retention Report, *supra* note 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> Childcare Report, *supra* note 29.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> Email from CDR Justin Nadolny to H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure Staff, (June 19, 2024), (on file with Comm.).

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> Recruitment and Retention Report, *supra* note 2.

V. WITNESSES

- Vice Admiral Thomas Allan Jr., Deputy Commandant for Mission Support, United States Coast Guard
- Master Chief Heath B. Jones, Master Chief Petty Officer, United States Coast Guard



# **ALWAYS READY: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A U.S. COAST GUARD SENTINEL**

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2024**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND  
MARITIME TRANSPORTATION,  
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 2:09 p.m., in room 2167 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Daniel Webster (Chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. The Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation will come to order.

I ask unanimous consent that the chairman be authorized to declare a recess at any time during today's hearing.

Without objection, show that ordered.

I ask unanimous consent that the Members not on the subcommittee be permitted to sit with the subcommittee at today's hearing and ask questions.

Without objection, show that ordered.

As a reminder, if Members insert a document into the record, please also email that document to DocumentsTI@mail.house.gov.

OK. So, I now recognize myself for the purpose of an opening statement for 5 minutes.

## **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DANIEL WEBSTER OF FLORIDA, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION**

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Today, our subcommittee meets to highlight the extraordinary successes of the men and women of the Coast Guard. At the same time, we are here to examine what investments could be made or must be made in order to keep the Coast Guard's most valuable resource: its people.

So, I would like to welcome today our witnesses, Vice Admiral Thomas Allan, Jr. Thank you for coming. And also we have our Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard, Chief Heath Jones. Thanks for coming—Master Chief—I am sorry.

First, I would like to thank the four junior enlisted men and women, the members of the Coast Guard, we just finished a lunch with them, and they gave us some awesome information, and I really appreciated it. I thought it was very helpful, maybe even in the future.

So, we had Chief Petty Officer Casper and Petty Officers Sizer, Ford, and Willis, all great examples of the many Coast Guard en-

listed members who make the Service work every day. I applaud them for their service.

At every rank, Coast Guard members perform extraordinary tasks in service to our Nation. Nearly every week, there is a news article highlighting the heroics, I guess, their work conducting search and rescue operations in life-threatening conditions, executing perilous high-speed drug interceptions, supporting the United States scientific communities through icebreaking operations in the most remote regions on the Earth. So, you are just an awesome group.

One of the greatest strengths of the Coast Guard is its people. Coast Guard members are resilient, capable, skilled, motivated. But as the Commandant has said, the readiness of the Coast Guard depends on its ability to support its people. This support should include well-maintained physical assets, like capable ships, aircraft, and infrastructure; must be also extended to personnel factors like housing, medical care, schooling, and childcare that influence the decision of members and their families to join or to remain in the Coast Guard.

Regrettably, in many of these areas, the Coast Guard has room for improvement. Chronic underfunding by Presidents and Congresses has left shoreside facilities like housing in disrepair; childcare options are scarce, and aging assets are the norm.

Short nearly 10 percent of its workforce, and facing ongoing recruiting and retention struggles, prioritization of the well-being of sentinels is more important now than ever. I am encouraged to hear that you are on track to reach this year's goal. That is awesome. Can't stop. Keep going. It is time to put the foot on the gas and keep the pedal to the metal as workforce shortages still remain.

So, today, I look forward to hearing how the Coast Guard is taking care of its members and their families so that they can be a better employer and be the employer of choice.

On that note, while it is not the purpose of this hearing, the Coast Guard recently informed this committee that not only has it failed to produce statutorily required acquisition planning documents for the last 9 years, it also has no intention of submitting a major acquisition program report at any point in the future. Similarly, we are still awaiting the fiscal year 2024 and fiscal year 2025 capital investment plans.

As a law enforcement agency, the Coast Guard cannot just pick and choose what laws they are going to follow because they have to set an example. A long-term acquisition plan is essential to providing Coast Guard members with the assets and support that they need to do their missions, as both the lunch earlier today and this hearing will probably highlight. If the Coast Guard maintains its stance and is unable to produce any of this information, we have no choice but to consider its inability to conduct meaningful acquisition planning in its future authorizations.

This is my warning to the Coast Guard: Please start saving yourselves from your own sinking ship. It would really be helpful.

To our witnesses, thank you for being here. Thank you for your preparation for today. This committee truly believes that you rep-

resent the world's best Coast Guard. Today, we hope to hear how Congress can help keep that tradition alive.

[Mr. Webster of Florida's prepared statement follows:]

---

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Daniel Webster of Florida, Chairman,  
Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation**

Today our subcommittee meets to highlight the extraordinary successes of the men and women of the Coast Guard. At the same time, we are here to examine what investments must be made into the Coast Guard's most valuable resource: its people.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses—Vice Admiral Thomas Allan Jr., Deputy Commandant for Mission Support, and Master Chief Heath Jones, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard.

First, I would like to thank the four junior enlisted members we just finished having lunch with. Chief Petty Officer Casper and Petty Officers Sizer, Ford, and Willis are great examples of the many Coast Guard enlisted members who make the Service work every day. I applaud them for their service.

At every rank, Coast Guard members perform extraordinary tasks in service to our nation. Nearly every week there's a news article highlighting their work—conducting search and rescue operations in life threatening conditions, executing perilous high-speed drug interceptions, and supporting the United States' scientific community through ice breaking operations in the most remote regions on Earth.

One of the greatest strengths of the Coast Guard is its people. Coast Guard members are resilient, capable, skilled, and motivated. But as the Commandant has said, the readiness of the Coast Guard depends on its ability to support its people.

This support should include well maintained physical assets, like capable ships, aircraft, and infrastructure. It must also extend to personal factors like housing, medical care, schooling, and childcare that influence the decision of members and their families to join or remain in the Coast Guard.

Regrettably, in many of these areas the Coast Guard has room for improvement. Chronic underfunding by presidents and Congress has left shoreside facilities, including housing, in disrepair; childcare options are scarce; and aging assets are the norm.

Short nearly ten percent of its workforce, and facing ongoing recruiting and retention struggles, prioritizing the wellbeing of Sentinels is more important than ever. I am encouraged to hear that you are on track to reach your recruiting goal for 2024, but this is no time to take your foot off the gas, as a workforce shortage still remains. So today, I look forward to hearing how the Coast Guard is taking care of its members and their families so it can be the employer of choice.

On that note, while it is not the purpose of this hearing, the Coast Guard recently informed this committee that not only has it failed to produce statutorily required acquisition planning documents for the last nine years, it has no intention of submitting a major acquisition program report at any point in the future. Similarly, we are still awaiting the Fiscal Year 2024 and Fiscal Year 2025 Capital Investment Plans.

As a law enforcement agency, the Coast Guard cannot just pick and choose what laws it follows. A long-term acquisition plan is essential to providing Coast Guard members with the assets and support they need to do their missions, as both the lynch earlier and this hearing will highlight. If the Coast Guard maintains its stance that it is unable to produce this information, we will have no choice but to consider its inability to conduct meaningful acquisition planning in its future authorizations.

This is my warning to the Coast Guard—please start saving yourself from your own sinking ship.

To our witnesses—thank you for participating today. This committee truly believes that you represent the world's best Coast Guard. Today, we hope to hear how Congress can help keep that tradition alive.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. And now—are you going to talk?

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will yield. Of course, I want to talk, but I will yield to our Ranking Member Larsen.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Mr. Larsen.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICK LARSEN OF WASHINGTON, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ranking Member, for calling today's hearing.

So, earlier this afternoon, we had an opportunity to sit down with enlisted members of the Coast Guard to hear their thoughts, their concerns, their adventures, their violation of Coast Guard policy in getting things done. I say it with some jest, because what we heard is that sometimes to do their job, they have got to go outside policy to save lives, and saving lives is what the Coast Guard does.

Hearing directly from enlisted personnel is incredibly helpful as this committee conducts oversight and it crafts policy affecting the Service. I want to thank the Coast Guard for making these Coasties available to us and take a moment to recognize and celebrate their incredible work with us over lunch, of all of our Coast Guard enlisted personnel.

So, over the course of this Congress, I have taken the opportunity as well to visit Coasties across the country, in New London and Pensacola, Maui, Baltimore, Grand Haven, Chicago, and various places in Alaska as well. It has been an invaluable experience. I encourage my colleagues to see as much of the Coast Guard as possible.

These women and men are really unsung heroes responsible for safeguarding our coasts and our people. They risk their lives conducting search and rescue operations, intercepting drug traffickers, and ensuring the safety of our coastal communities. Their dedication and bravery exemplify the highest ideals of the Service.

So, I want to say thank you to all the servicemembers that joined us today and to all the Coasties for your service.

In my own State of Washington, there are about 2,300 enlisted Coast Guard personnel. These dedicated individuals play a crucial role in responding to emergencies, enforcing laws, and protecting the natural resources in the region. From the very busy ports in Seattle and Portland and—sorry—Salem, Tacoma, and Everett, and probably Portland, too, to the rugged shores of the San Juan Islands, their presence ensures that our maritime environment remains safe and secure.

As Coast Guard members serve our country with distinction, it is our responsibility, therefore, to ensure they have the resources they need, including affordable housing, essential health services, childcare, and up-to-date cutters, aircraft, and technology.

Due to the unique mission of the Service, the Coast Guard stations are often in remote or high-cost coastal areas. So, the stress of expensive housing takes a toll on servicemember well-being and overall readiness. Limited Coast Guard-owned housing and the Department of Defense's Basic Allowance for Housing, or BAH, which does not appropriately consider Coast Guard locations, forces personnel to find more affordable housing with longer commutes.

On healthcare, the Coast Guard does offer healthcare benefits, but the accessibility and quality of care is inconsistent. Too many personnel face long wait times for appointments and limited access to specialized care. So, our Coasties deserve not only a robust

healthcare system, but also the access to other services, like behavioral health services, that meet their needs promptly and effectively.

According to the Coast Guard Foundation, in 2022, Coast Guard members died from suicide twice as often as their peers in other military services. So, investing in behavioral health, mental health is just not a moral obligation, it is critical to save the lives of our Coasties.

Many enlisted personnel are also parents who juggle demanding work schedules with family responsibilities. The servicemembers often have difficulty finding affordable and reliable childcare, which has a direct impact on their ability to do their jobs.

So, while funding was provided in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to build four new child development centers in areas like Kodiak, the Coast Guard has struggled with staffing. This limits the number of dependents who can enroll and forces members to look elsewhere for childcare, something that can be very difficult in more remote areas.

And, finally, while we take pride in the remarkable contributions of our people, we have to provide them with the tools and resources they need for the job. The Coast Guard has been too slow to adopt new technology, in fact. In the wake of a personnel shortage of nearly 10 percent, the Service must take advantage of all available technology to effectively conduct missions and prevent burnout. Increased adoption of remote sensors, autonomous systems, and AI tools could help to relieve pressure on a strained workforce. Unfortunately, these technologies require funding, which we have not provided in recent years.

So, it is clear we have a responsibility to ensure that those who are dedicating their lives to protecting us receive the resources and support they need to thrive, both on duty and off duty.

So, I take the opportunity, when I can, to see Coast Guard stations across the country. I have seen firsthand the challenges our Coasties are facing. Meeting with enlisted members like this afternoon was extremely helpful, much more exciting than having a hearing, honestly. And I encourage all my colleagues to visit the Coast Guard, get out on the water, get up in the air with them, as I did in Pensacola, to truly see the value that they provide to our country.

With that, I yield back.

[Mr. Larsen of Washington's prepared statement follows:]

---

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Rick Larsen of Washington, Ranking Member,  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**

Thank you, Chairman Webster, for calling today's hearing.

Earlier this afternoon, we had an opportunity to sit down with enlisted members of the Coast Guard to hear their thoughts, their concerns, their adventures, their violations of Coast Guard policy to get things done. I say that with some jest because what we heard is that sometimes to do their job, they have to go outside policy to save lives and saving lives is what the Coast Guard does.

Hearing directly from enlisted personnel is incredibly helpful as this Committee conducts oversight and crafts policy affecting the Service. I would like to thank the Coast Guard for making those Coasties available and take a moment to recognize and celebrate the incredible work of our Coast Guard enlisted personnel.

Over the course of this Congress, I've also taken the opportunity to visit Coasties across the country in places like New London, Pensacola, Maui, Baltimore, Bellingham, Grand Haven and Chicago. It has been an invaluable experience, and I encourage my colleagues to see as much of the Coast Guard as possible.

These women and men are unsung heroes responsible for safeguarding our coasts and our people.

They risk their lives conducting search and rescue operations, intercepting drug traffickers and ensuring the safety of our coastal communities. Their dedication and bravery exemplify the highest ideals of service.

Thank you to all the servicemembers that joined us today and to all Coasties for your service.

In Washington State alone, there are over 2,300 enlisted Coast Guard personnel. These dedicated individuals play a crucial role in responding to emergencies, enforcing laws and protecting natural resources in the region.

From the very busy ports in Seattle and Tacoma and Everett, and probably Portland, too, to the rugged shores of the San Juan Islands, their presence ensures that our maritime environment remains safe and secure.

As Coast Guard members serve our country with distinction, it is our responsibility to ensure they have the resources they need, including affordable housing, essential health services, childcare and up-to-date cutters, aircraft and technology.

Due to the unique mission of the Service, Coast Guard stations are often in remote or high-cost coastal areas.

The stress of expensive housing takes a toll on servicemember well-being and overall readiness. Limited Coast Guard-owned housing and the Department of Defense's Basic Allowance for Housing, which does not appropriately consider Coast Guard locations, forces personnel to find more affordable housing with longer commutes.

While the Coast Guard does offer healthcare benefits, the accessibility and quality of care is inconsistent. Too many personnel face long wait times for appointments and limited access to specialized care.

Coast Guard members deserve, not only a robust healthcare system, but also access to mental health services that meet their needs promptly and effectively.

According to the Coast Guard Foundation, in 2022, Coast Guard members died from suicide twice as often as their peers in other military services. Investing in mental health is not just a moral obligation, it is critical for saving the lives of our Coasties.

Many enlisted personnel are also parents who juggle demanding work schedules with family responsibilities.

Servicemembers often have difficulty finding affordable and reliable childcare which has a direct impact on their ability to do their jobs.

While funding was provided in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to build four new Child Development Centers in remote areas like Kodiak, Alaska, the Coast Guard has struggled with staffing.

This limits the number of dependents who can enroll and forces members to look elsewhere for childcare—something very difficult to find in more remote areas.

While we take pride in the remarkable contributions of our Coast Guard enlisted personnel, we must also provide them with the tools and resources required to do their job.

The Coast Guard is too slow to adopt new technology. In the wake of a personnel shortage of nearly 10 percent, the service must take advantage of all available technology to effectively conduct missions and prevent burnout.

Increased adoption of remote sensors, autonomous systems and artificial intelligence tools could help to relieve pressure on a strained workforce. Unfortunately, those technologies require funding which has not been provided in recent years.

We have a responsibility to ensure that those who dedicate their lives to protecting us receive the resources and support they need to thrive both on duty and off duty.

I take every opportunity I get to see Coast Guard stations around the country, and I have seen firsthand the challenges our Coasties are facing.

Meeting with enlisted members this afternoon was extremely helpful, much more exciting than having a hearing, honestly, and I encourage all of my colleagues to visit the Coast Guard and get out on the water, get up in the air with them, as I did in Pensacola, to truly see the value that they provide to our country.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Ranking Member Larsen of the full committee yields back.

So, the ranking member from the subcommittee, Mr. Carbajal, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SALUD O. CARBAJAL OF CALIFORNIA, RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION**

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Chairman Webster, for having this hearing, and to all our witnesses that are here, Master Chief Jones and Vice Admiral Allan.

I must say, before we move on, that Ranking Member Larsen has brought the fanny pack back into fashion all by himself. I don't know if anybody knows that. I just thought I would codify that on the record.

Over the past 3 years, I have had the opportunity to visit Coast Guard stations across the country. I have been on icebreakers, National Security Cutters, Fast Response Cutters, various aircraft, and small vessels. Each visit has left me with a sense of deep appreciation for what the Coasties do for our country every single day. I am sure that anyone who has a chance to interact with members of the Coast Guard feels the same way.

As ranking member of this subcommittee, I take my role of the Coast Guard promoter very seriously. I recognize the Coast Guard is the premier agency tasked with protecting the American people and safeguarding our national security interests along our shores and beyond. I understand the tremendous value that the Service provides to the community when Coasties fulfill the diverse missions across the United States and the globe.

The Service is only successful, though, because of its servicemembers. They are there when a boater or a swimmer gets into trouble. They prevent drugs being smuggled across the sea from harming our communities. They intercept migrants who are trafficked across our maritime border when their lives are placed at risk by transnational criminal organizations.

They protect our precious ecosystem from harm by preventing oil from spilling into our waters and jeopardizing coastal economies. They demand excellence in maintaining sustainable fisheries when those fisheries are threatened by illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing operations. And they uphold the flow of American goods and commerce.

The Coast Guard is always ready and always there. Coasties are *semper paratus*. But as the Service is always there and always ready to serve the American people, so too must Congress be there for the Coast Guard. I am working to ensure the Coast Guard receives the funding and support it needs to execute each of its vital missions. This means not only providing the resources for new classes of cutters, assets, and facilities, but also investing in people, the very fabric of the Service.

As a veteran myself, I have always been proud to represent our servicemembers in Congress. As a longtime resident and Representative of the Central Coast of California, I know firsthand the challenges that our Coasties and their families face.

Many Coasties are forced to live hours from their duty stations because there is insufficient housing. They often travel unacceptable distances to visit doctors. Coasties have limited access to

childcare, which often results in couples alternating parenting duties based on their work schedules or being forced to quit altogether.

These challenges weigh on the mental and physical welfare of Coasties. We must do better. Despite these challenges, the Coast Guard is always ready and always there. For that, I, and the American people, are forever grateful.

However, I recognize that gratitude alone does not pay the bills. I have major concerns about the funding needed to keep up with the backlog in infrastructure, the investment in the new assets such as cutters and helicopters, and everyday support services to the fleet. Recruitment, retention, and the success of every mission depend on it. This subcommittee is hard at work to make sure that your needs are recognized.

To the Coasties who joined us today and across the world, thank you for all of your unconditional service to our Nation. I am proud to advocate for America's great Coast Guard and look forward to the testimony today to hear about how Congress can do better to support the Service.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

[Mr. Carbajal's prepared statement follows:]

---

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Salud O. Carbajal of California, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation**

Good afternoon, and thank you, Chair Webster, for calling today's hearing. The testimonies we are receiving today are paramount to the success of the Coast Guard and the future of the enlisted workforce.

Over the past three years, I've had the opportunity to visit Coast Guard stations across the country. I've been on icebreakers, National Security Cutters, Fast Response Cutters, various aircraft and small vessels.

Each visit has left me with a sense of deep appreciation for what Coasties do for our country every single day. I am sure that anyone who has a chance to interact with members of the Coast Guard feels the same.

As Ranking Member of this Subcommittee, I take my role of Coast Guard promoter very seriously. I recognize the Coast Guard is the premier agency tasked with protecting the American people and safeguarding our national security interests along our shores and beyond.

I understand the tremendous value that the service provides to the community when Coasties fulfill the diverse missions across the United States and the globe.

The service is only successful, though, because of its servicemembers. They are there when a boater or swimmer gets into trouble. They prevent drugs being smuggled across the sea from harming our communities. They intercept migrants who are trafficked across our maritime border when their lives are placed at risk by transnational criminal organizations.

They protect our precious ecosystem from harm by preventing oil from spilling into our waters and jeopardizing coastal economies. They demand excellence in maintaining sustainable fisheries when those fisheries are threatened by illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing operations. And they uphold the flow of American goods and commerce.

The Coast Guard is always ready and always there—Coasties are *Semper Paratus*.

But as the service is always there and always ready to serve the American people, so too must Congress be there for the Coast Guard. I am working to ensure the Coast Guard receives the funding and support it needs to execute each of its vital missions. This means not only providing the resources for new classes of cutters, assets and facilities, but also investing in people, the very fabric of the service.

As a veteran myself, I have always been proud to represent our servicemembers in Congress. As a long-time resident and representative of the Central Coast of California, I know first-hand the challenges that our Coasties and their families face.

Many Coasties are forced to live hours from their duty stations because there is insufficient housing. They often travel unacceptable distances to visit doctors. Coasties have limited access to childcare, which often results in couples alternating parenting duties based on their work schedules or being forced to quit work altogether.

These challenges weigh on the mental and physical welfare of Coasties. We must do better.

Despite these challenges, the Coast Guard is always ready and always there. For that, I, and the American people, are forever grateful. However, I recognize that gratitude alone does not pay the bills.

I have major concerns about the funding needed to keep up with the backlog in infrastructure, the investments in new assets such as cutters and helicopters and everyday support services to the fleet. Recruitment, retention, and the success of every mission depend on it. This Subcommittee is hard at work to make sure that your needs are recognized.

To the Coasties who joined us here today and across the world, thank you all for your unconditional service to our nation. I am proud to advocate for America's great Coast Guard and look forward to the testimony today to hear about how Congress can better support the service.

I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. OK. Well, I would like to welcome again our witnesses and thank them for being here today. I really appreciate it.

Briefly, I would like to take this moment to explain our lighting system. Green means go, yellow means slow down, red means stop. Pretty simple. And we are going to kind of stick to that.

I ask unanimous consent that the witnesses' full statements be included in the record.

Without objection, show that ordered.

I ask for unanimous consent that the record of today's hearing be open until such time as the witnesses have provided answers to any questions that may have been submitted to them.

Without objection, show that ordered.

I also ask for unanimous consent the record remain open for 15 days for any additional comments and information submitted by Members or witnesses to be included in today's hearing record.

Without objection, show that done.

So, as your written testimony has been made a part of the record, the committee asks you to limit your speaking time to 5 minutes.

And with that, Vice Admiral Allan, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**TESTIMONY OF VICE ADMIRAL THOMAS G. ALLAN, JR., DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR MISSION SUPPORT, U.S. COAST GUARD; AND MASTER CHIEF HEATH B. JONES, MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE COAST GUARD, U.S. COAST GUARD**

**TESTIMONY OF VICE ADMIRAL THOMAS G. ALLAN, JR., DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR MISSION SUPPORT, U.S. COAST GUARD**

Admiral ALLAN. Good afternoon, Chairman Webster, Ranking Member Larsen, Ranking Member Carbajal, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on this important topic.

The U.S. Coast Guard is one of the world's premier multimission maritime services responsible for the safety, security, and steward-

ship of our Nation's waters. Our 58,000 members conduct dynamic homeland security defense missions around the globe, 24/7, 365 days a year. As a Deputy Commandant for mission support, it is my duty to make certain these members have the needs to remain always ready.

Our workforce is the heart of the Coast Guard. Every day, our people put their lives on the line to protect, defend, and save. They are operating under the strain of one of the largest workforce shortages of our 234-year history. Even though the Coast Guard achieved its Active Duty recruiting goals for the first time since 2017, and met all the goals for officers, enlisted, and reserve sessions for the first time since 2007, we must continue to work to find new ways to make the Coast Guard a place people want to come to work, to excel, to have a career, and to deliver the mission our Nation expects.

To remain the world's greatest Coast Guard, we must retain our most precious resource: our workforce. We must clarify and fortify our core values for our crews, and we must invest in a talent management system that cultivates the individual and collective skills the Service needs.

Our efforts to upgrade our human resource IT system will enable a more robust system to effectively capture unique aspects of our personnel and better match their talents to Service needs. Our modernized training system must deliver personalized on-demand training and ensure the continuous professional development of our workforce.

The Coast Guard training centers are the foundations of our workforce. We greatly appreciate Congress' recent investments in recruit barracks at Training Center Cape May where all Coast Guard enlisted members start their service and receive their basic training.

The Coast Guard Academy is operating without data facilities, plagued by mold and asbestos. We need your support to facilitate critical improvements at both Cape May and the Academy, investments vital to developing our world-class workforce.

The Coast Guard is unique among the military services. Our members are widely dispersed and embedded in small communities throughout the Nation, often far removed from large military installations and those amenities. It is important our geographically dispersed workforce is critical.

Access to quality healthcare, both mental and physical, is one of the most significant issues currently facing Coast Guard families. With the help of Congress, we expanded behavioral health resources and now have enlisted behavioral health technicians and mental behavioral health providers serving at units across the Nation.

Housing remains a concern as well. Many of our members are assigned to remote vacation destinations with scarce and expensive rental options. We are incredibly thankful for your support for our housing projects. We have much work ahead, but with Congress' essential support, we can ensure Coast Guard members are focused on critical missions, reassured their health and family needs are well supported.

We must properly recruit, train, and equip our workforce to maintain mission excellence. With your support and the Commandant's focus on leadership and culture at all levels of the organization, we can strengthen recruitment, modernize top talent management, expand support services, and guarantee that our members are physically, mentally, and spiritually well prepared to execute their duties.

Together, we can build a Coast Guard that remains always ready to meet the challenges our Nation will face in the years ahead.

Thank you for the opportunity and for your steadfast support of the Coast Guard. I am humbled to serve and represent this incredible workforce, and I look forward to your questions.

Thank you, sir.

[Admiral Allan's prepared statement follows:]

---

**Prepared Statement of Vice Admiral Thomas G. Allan, Jr., Deputy  
Commandant for Mission Support, U.S. Coast Guard**

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Chairman Webster, Ranking Member Carbajal, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today and thank you for your continued support of the United States Coast Guard and our workforce.

The U.S. Coast Guard is the world's premier, multi-mission maritime service responsible for the safety, security, and stewardship of the maritime domain. The Service's 57,000 active duty, reserve, and civilian personnel, supported by 21,000 Auxiliary volunteers, conduct dynamic homeland security and defense missions around the globe on a 24/7 basis 365 days-a-year. The Coast Guard's homeland security and defense operations enable the Nation's economic prosperity, enforce our laws at sea, protect the marine environment, and perform vital lifesaving missions to ensure the safety, security, and resiliency of America's far-reaching maritime interests.

Our people are our most valuable resource. The Coast Guard workforce is the heart and soul of our organization, and their dedication and sacrifice keep our Nation safe and secure. Every day, Coast Guard members put their lives on the line to protect, defend, and save. Though we have made considerable progress, the Coast Guard continues to face one of the largest workforce shortages in the Service's 233-year history, operating 10 percent below authorized strength within our enlisted ranks. This workforce shortage threatens our daily operations and challenges our ability to adapt to future mission demands.

I am incredibly proud of our Coast Guard Active Duty, Reserve, Civilian, and Auxiliary workforce and remain optimistic about our future. We must continually scan the horizon and intentionally plot a course to move forward in the face of growing demand and evolving threats. Our status as the world's best Coast Guard rests on our ability to recruit, train, equip, and employ our Nation's best and most motivated people to stand the watch and answer the call.

RECRUITING OUR WORKFORCE

In the past year, the Coast Guard made significant strides in recruitment, launching several impactful initiatives aimed at building a robust and diverse workforce ready to meet future mission demands.

One notable advancement was introducing a "Talent Acquisition" (TA) rating earlier this year. This new rating creates a specialized corps of recruiters whose sole focus is honing their skills and growing the Coast Guard's talent pool. The first wave of positions converted to TA billets included leadership roles such as recruiter-in-charge and regional supervisors, marking a shift toward professionalizing recruiting as a dedicated career path. This initiative lays the foundation for a more future-ready Service by ensuring skilled and motivated individuals are at the helm of recruiting efforts.

The Coast Guard greatly appreciates the support of Congress in its efforts to resource recruitment initiatives, facilitating innovative approaches to attract talent

and expand lateral entry opportunities to access applicants with advanced skills. Additionally, with Congress's support, the Service is establishing new recruiting offices and offering targeted incentives to recruit and retain members in high-demand fields like cyberspace and maritime law enforcement. These initiatives are key to drawing new talent, particularly in specialized areas where private sector competition is fierce.

Looking forward, the Coast Guard will continue to leverage improved analytics to build our workforce and refine our recruitment processes, including modernizing accession standards, removing ineffective and obsolete barriers to entry, and creating pathways to service. For example, the Coast Guard instituted the Future Sentinel Preparatory Course to assist previously ineligible individuals to meet Coast Guard body composition standards. This program is designed to unlock potential and improve quality of life by teaching healthy habits while preparing new recruits for service.

Our enhanced recruiting efforts are making an impact. This year, the Coast Guard achieved its active duty recruiting goals for the first time since 2017 and all three of our goals for officers, enlisted, and reserve for the first time since 2007. We will not take one year of success for granted and we will continue to support the total workforce by investing in every effort to attract the people our units need to deliver the mission our Nation expects.

#### TRAINING OUR WORKFORCE

To remain the world's greatest Coast Guard, we must cultivate, value, and retain the talent the Service needs to meet tomorrow's challenges.

We continue to make significant progress modernizing training systems to deliver tailored, on-demand training at the point of need and ensure continuous growth of a mission-ready workforce. By implementing agile training courses, personalized to the unique needs of each member, we reduced overall training time and improved efficiency in several courses. Additionally, our new augmented reality and simulation technology tools significantly improved both safety and training effectiveness at our training centers. Furthermore, the Coast Guard is investing in a modernized on-line learning management system to deliver flexible, accessible, and personalized learning opportunities to our entire workforce. To support these essential efforts, the Coast Guard established the Talent Management Transformation-Program Integration Office to guide the Service towards sustained workforce modernization.

Cultivating our future workforce requires we provide our members with the workplace climate they expect and deserve. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2025, the Coast Guard will establish the Sentinel Transformation and Readiness Training (START) program, an enlisted service preparatory course to immediately follow recruit training. This course will strengthen Service culture by building upon Recruit Training to strengthen our newest members with a foundational understanding of our Core Values of Honor, Respect and Devotion to Duty, as well as further equipping them with tools and knowledge to prevent sexual assault and harassment and increase individual resilience.

Coast Guard training centers remain a foundation for our workforce development programs, instilling leadership, professionalism, and excellence across our future officer and enlisted ranks. The Coast Guard greatly appreciates the support of Congress for recent investments in recruit barracks at Training Center Cape May and continued improvements to the Coast Guard Academy's Chase Hall. While we made significant progress, much work remains to provide recruits and cadets the facilities necessary to sustain training performance and prepare our workforce for Coast Guard service. The FY 2025 Unfunded Priorities List includes critical improvements at the Coast Guard Academy and Training Center Cape May—investments necessary to provide appropriate infrastructure to bring new members into the Coast Guard workforce.

#### SUPPORTING OUR WORKFORCE

People joining our Service today have different needs, desires, and expectations than those who served in previous generations. Improving quality of life results in higher professional motivation, retention, performance, and resilience. However, the Coast Guard is unique among the military services, as our members are generally dispersed and embedded in small communities throughout the Nation, often far removed from large military installations and amenities. For the Coast Guard, this creates a distinct readiness challenge to resource and address. We must work with Congress and the communities that our members reside in to meet the unique and multifaceted needs of our service members and their families to ensure they remain Always Ready.

### *Childcare*

As we forge ahead with our mission to support and uplift our workforce, our investments in childcare help ensure our personnel remain resilient and mission-ready each day. We recognize the significant challenges of balancing demanding roles and family responsibilities. When our members have access to reliable and affordable childcare, along with other essential support services, they can focus on mission and are better equipped to excel in their duties and contribute effectively to our operational responsibilities.

We are strengthening our partnership with the Navy to streamline and expand access to childcare fee assistance programs. This collaboration will introduce direct payment options to members and extend eligibility to include civilians, enhancing our support for those with special needs children or non-standard work hours. By investing in these support services, we are not just addressing immediate needs but also laying the groundwork for long-term success.

However, high childcare costs continue to impact our workforce across the country, but particularly those without access to Department of Defense (DoD) or Coast Guard Child Development Centers. Serving on our coasts often means living in high cost-of-living coastal communities but without affordable, quality childcare options like those available to DoD.

While we are thankful to Congress for its support of our Child Development Centers and childcare subsidies, we must continue to find ways to enhance these vital services and ensure our workforce and their families are supported and able to meet mission requirements.

### *Access to Healthcare*

Access to quality healthcare—both mental and physical—is one of the most critical issues currently affecting Coast Guard families. Families stationed in small or remote communities often experience very limited access to primary and specialty care. Recognizing this need, the Coast Guard made significant strides through the Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022, which mandated an expansion in behavioral health resources. The Service trained over a dozen enlisted behavioral health technicians and 13 Medical Behavioral Health Providers currently serving at units across the Nation.

Furthermore, the Coast Guard made investments to increase mental health capabilities throughout the Service, representing a long-term commitment to monitor, detect, and coordinate timely and appropriate care for all aspects of mental and behavioral health needs. In addition, the Service continues to bolster clinical resources to provide staffing positions to meet deployment demands.

These advancements align with the Coast Guard's broader initiative to enhance healthcare access and support systems for our workforce. Investments in mental health capabilities demonstrate a long-term commitment to addressing mental and behavioral health needs. Additionally, the Coast Guard leverages innovative solutions such as telemedicine and electronic health records to improve service delivery. Much work remains and Congressional support is essential to ensuring Coast Guard service members can focus on their critical missions while their health and family needs are well-supported.

### *Housing*

Housing remains a pressing concern. All service members and their dependents deserve adequate housing within a reasonable commute. However, many small coastal communities in which our members reside are vacation destinations with extremely high cost of living and scarcity in long-term rental housing. Due to the proliferation of short-term vacation rentals and rapid price appreciation in coastal communities post-COVID, I am aware of Coast Guard members and their families who were forced out of their homes and left with commutes to their duty stations of upwards of 90 minutes each way. Our workforce is resilient and dedicated to the mission; however, we must do more to ensure affordable, quality housing is available to each Coast Guard family.

Our ongoing efforts focus on enhancing housing options and increasing resources. For example, in remote locations such as Neah Bay, Washington, Jonesport, Maine, and Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, the Coast Guard is providing government-owned family housing, a step essential in addressing the severe shortage of rental properties in these isolated communities.

The Coast Guard is extremely grateful for the support of Congress for housing projects in places like Kodiak and Seward, Alaska, Portage Bay, Michigan, Novato, California, Rio Bayamon, Puerto Rico, and Fort Wadsworth, New York. The FY 2025 Unfunded Priorities List includes an additional request for \$10 million for the con-

tinued recapitalization of housing units at Fort Wadsworth to support Coast Guard members in the New York City area.

*Assets and Facilities*

We must continue to equip our workforce—investing in the places they work and the assets they use to accomplish the mission. Coast Guard facilities are in areas prone to hurricanes, flooding, sea level rise, erosion, earthquakes, deadly wildfires, and other natural disasters. Those facilities must be safe and resilient to meet mission demands and allow our workforce to do the work they joined the Service to do. The Nation’s reliance upon the Coast Guard to serve as a first responder after disasters, underscores the importance of resilient facilities. Investments in modern facilities will enhance mission capabilities, empower our workforce, and secure our Nation.

Similarly, the Coast Guard appreciates Congressional support to continue the largest fleet recapitalization effort since World War II. Equipping our exceptional workforce with the modern cutters, aircraft, boats, and facilities they require to complete their vital missions remains one of our Commandant’s highest strategic priorities. The FY 2025 President’s Budget and Unfunded Priorities List contain essential investments in current and future readiness to ensure the Coast Guard remains responsive to evolving threats and growing global demand.

CONCLUSION

Our exceptional Coast Guard members join the Service to conduct Coast Guard operations and execute Coast Guard missions. Drawn to our unique value proposition to the Nation, our workforce is motivated and eager to rescue mariners, patrol the seas, and protect our shores. As the Coast Guard recruits, trains, and equips our workforce, mission excellence thrives. We must continue to enhance recruitment efforts, pursue a modernized talent management system, and expand support services for our members and their families to ensure they are prepared to execute difficult and demanding missions. Such investments will ensure that our personnel are well-prepared and fully supported, enabling the Coast Guard to confidently employ and deploy our crews to successfully execute their critical missions.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and for all your support for the Coast Guard. I am humbled by the privilege to serve with and represent our workforce. I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you very much.

I do want to acknowledge the fact that Carol Jones, the wife of Master Chief Jones, is the ambassador for the U.S. Coast Guard for families, and she is here today with us. So, thank you for being here, Carol. That is an awesome position.

Now, Master Chief Jones, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**TESTIMONY OF MASTER CHIEF HEATH B. JONES, MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE COAST GUARD, U.S. COAST GUARD**

Master Chief JONES. Thank you.

And good afternoon, Chairman Webster, Ranking Member Larsen, Ranking Member Carbajal, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. Thank you for your continued support and the opportunity to appear before you today as the Master Chief Petty Officer of the world’s greatest Coast Guard.

It is my honor to represent the total workforce who tirelessly serve our Nation. The support and resources provided by Congress are vital, and your continued investment in our personnel ensures the Coast Guard remains agile, capable, and prepared to meet the demands of all of our critical missions.

As an essential part of the Department of Homeland Security, we focus on safeguarding our maritime interests, protecting natural resources, and ensuring security of vital U.S. ports and waterways. Through integration with our sister DoD services and the Joint

Force as a whole, we are prepared to address global threats from foreign adversaries. Our dual focus on homeland security and global readiness is vital for our own national security and economic prosperity.

The demand for Coast Guard services to expand while the needs of our sentinels have grown in complexity and scope, whether executing search and rescue missions, defending our national security, enforcing maritime laws, or responding to natural disasters, our personnel remain always ready to protect, to defend, and to save.

Our ability to safeguard U.S. interests in both the maritime domain and the broader defense framework depends on continued investment in our personnel, infrastructure, and our fleet. With the support and resources provided by Congress, the Coast Guard is positioned to remain not only a capable maritime service, but a crucial asset and maintain the Nation's strategic posture.

Without doubt, the strength and success of our Coast Guard lies with our workforce, the talented people who serve with dedication and professionalism every single day. You've heard firsthand today the inspiring stories of bravery from our folks that have joined us. To meet the evolving demands of our mission, we need your support to focus on the development of our sentinels from recruitment through retirement. By fostering an environment where continuous learning and improvement are valued, we empower members to adapt and excel.

Experiences at Training Center Cape May and the Coast Guard Academy provide a vital foundation for service, and starting in fiscal year 2025, we will reinforce that foundation with the Sentinel Transformation and Readiness Training course, which will prepare our newest enlisted members of the organization with practical skills and knowledge they need to contribute effectively from day one. The START program, a post-basic training program, focuses on our core values of honor, respect, and devotion to duty, while providing classes on financial literacy, emotional and social intelligence, accountability, and other traits essential for success in today's Coast Guard.

Additionally, we are working to ensure that our core values are emphasized during leadership training at all levels and personnel evaluations of every pay grade, from the newest recruit to the most senior officer. This approach provides members clear guidance and purpose and ensures they understand how their actions and contributions to the organization impact the overall success of our Coast Guard. When members at every level recognize their role in shaping Service culture, it fosters an environment of accountability and positivity. An empowered and supported workforce is better prepared to meet our mission demands.

Furthermore, the Coast Guard's ability to recruit and retain talent is directly tied to how well we support both our members and their families. A future capable workforce is one that feels valued, not just in their professional roles, but also in their personal lives, which is why our recruitment and retention strategy is increasingly focused on creating a supportive environment that meets the needs of every Coast Guard family. By investing in the quality of total compensation and parity with Department of Defense, we can increase support for housing, childcare, and spousal support initia-

tives, ensuring that our members and our families are fully supported, allowing them to focus on their mission with confidence.

We ask for Congress' continued support in making these investments to secure the future of the Coast Guard and our workforce.

I thank you for this opportunity. I look forward to answering your questions today.

[Master Chief Jones did not submit a prepared statement.]

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you both for being here today. I really appreciate it.

And we will look for either one of you to answer—I get the first 5 minutes of questions, and the question could be to one or both of you, and answer away.

August 4th marked the 234th birthday of the Coast Guard, and the Service is celebrating that birthday tonight here at the Capitol. I look forward to celebrating the more than two centuries of dedicated service the Coast Guard has spent protecting our Nation's maritime interests and being with you this evening.

The committee knows you represent the world's finest, best Coast Guard in the world. However, this committee is well aware also of the aging infrastructure and workforce shortages and insufficient budget that has operationally constrained the Coast Guard for—more than just this year—many years.

What is the Coast Guard doing to address shortcomings in housing, healthcare, childcare, recruitment, and education that affect retention and the daily lives of Coast Guard enlisted members and their families? So, that is my first question.

Admiral ALLAN. Thank you for the question.

The Coast Guard, as you got to hear over lunch, has some great people that are doing some great missions. And I think as you heard from the Commandant earlier this year, she talked about where does the Coast Guard need to be. The Nation is demanding a Coast Guard that provides all kinds of services. We need to be a \$20 billion Coast Guard. We need to have \$3 billion, at least, in our capital acquisition.

And I think as we start to talk about those amounts of money and what we can do with them, we will stop making tradeoffs between operations and support to our people and get to the things that you just talked about. How can we better do housing? With your help, we are building housing. We are building some great housing up in Kodiak. We are redeveloping housing in Puerto Rico, and we are looking for those areas where it is scarce to find housing on the regular market.

Through your help, we are adding individuals to just about every one of our programs, especially those with mental health, to be able to respond to our sentinels that are on the coast and in areas that are deprived of regular resources.

So, we thank you for that. But I think if we are going to do more, we are going to continue to work with you, we are going to continue to identify those areas where we have needs, and we will look for your support.

Thank you.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you very much.

The Coast Guard has previously briefed the committee on its steps taken to recruit, and you have made many of the goals you

had set for this year, retention challenges, all those things, bringing additional recruiters in and the criteria necessary to select recruits, and providing remedial support and helping recruits through Cape May, where the enlisted members of the Coast Guard receive their basic training.

How are these programs working? And are recruiting and retention numbers coming up?

Master Chief JONES. Thanks for the question, Congressman.

As you heard, we met our recruiting goal for the first time since 2017. For the first time in 8 years, the lines crossed this year, and we have brought in more people than we are losing this year. Our retention numbers are good and encouraging.

In addition to the good news on the recruiting, not only did we meet our goal, we are going to bring in this fiscal year just short of 4,500 members, which is our best number since 2003, and the buses are full going into Cape May through December of this year, as well. So, we are off to a great start into next year, as well.

We have opened more recruiting offices with the help from Congress. Thank you for that.

We also this year—we were the only branch in the military that did not have professional recruiters. Our folks—it could be any one of these four amazing human beings you had lunch with—could do their jobs, then step out, go be a recruiter, then come back into their jobs. This year, we stood up a Talent Acquisition specialist rating so that if someone goes in and they start becoming a recruiter, they find out that they love it and they are great at it, then we can keep them to be recruiters for the rest of their career.

And as you said in your opening statement, sir, just because we had a great year, the foot is on the gas pedal. We are not letting up. We need another 3 to 5 years like this to get rid of the workforce shortage, and so, we are continuing to pour everything we can into it.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. All right. My time has expired. So, let me call on Mr. Van Drew—or wait. We got these two guys first. Go ahead.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will yield to our ranking member for questions.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thanks. Thank you.

Master Chief Jones, with the Coast Guard operating at 10 percent below authorized levels as a result of closure or downgrade of dozens of stations and early decommissioning of cutters, how has the workforce been impacted itself by the implementation of the alignment, the force alignment initiative?

Master Chief JONES. Thank you, Rep. Larsen.

I think in the very beginning, we had to communicate to the workforce on why we were doing that. What we could not continue to do was serve the Nation at a 40,000-person level with 35,000 people. So, in some of these areas where we were able to consolidate some stations, go on a scheduled mission only, what we have done—I will use our opportunity when we were in Grand Haven together. Grand Haven was one of those stations where we consolidated, and what the officer in charge, the Master Chief there shared with us is that, number one, they have not missed a mission. They have met everything, but they have the people they

need. He said they're busier than ever, but he also expressed that his crew is happier than they have been in a long time, because as you can see, every time you get around a busy sentinel, it is a happy sentinel. They come to work, and they want to do great things every day. So, it does not mean that we need to normalize being 5,000 people short. We are getting after that piece.

But to date right now, as far as the executing of the mission, our sentinels are in a really good place around the country. In some areas, we need to do a better job of giving them the tools that they need so that they can do their jobs, especially when it comes to the maintenance of our assets.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Yes. On the recruitment and retention number for this past year, I think 4,800 or so, do you have an assessment yet about whether you sort of did the easy stuff, now it is hard, or do you have a sense this is the foundation and it is carrying over into year 2 and then year 3 and so on?

Master Chief JONES. And this is just an anecdotal assessment, sir. We feel like a solid foundation has been laid. We feel like some of the—I guess, the hangover effects from trying to recruit in a COVID environment. We are back into the schools. We are back out there getting our word.

One challenge that I gave the entire workforce when I came into this job and I often shared with them, my favorite thing about our sentinels is that they are humble servants of America, and you heard that at lunch. And the thing that frustrates me the most is they are humble servants of America. So, I challenge them to get out and to tell their story. Tell the story of what they do. Tell those great stories that you just heard at lunch, because what we are proving is when people learn about the United States Coast Guard, people want to serve and become a United States Coast Guard.

We just did a big recruiting event in Illinois this weekend and talking to a lot of our recruiters, I asked them, hey, how is it going? What is working? Why is it working? And they all just looked at me without skipping a beat and they said, because we have the best product in the world. They said, we have the product. We just have to get the word out.

So, we are very optimistic that solid foundation has been laid, and it has been proven because the numbers are already stacking up for next year, sir.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. I am sure it is kind of hard because you are combining the mission with recruitment, but in Chicago, I went out on the Chicago River and then out towards the lake with the Coast Guard. You all did the same thing in Milwaukee as well. It seemed like a good recruiting opportunity, but you can't put non-Coasties in places physically where they shouldn't be during a high security time.

But how do you take advantage of those kinds of big opportunities in order to attract attention to the work that you do and then recruit?

Master Chief JONES. So, I give all the credit in the world to just the amazing innovation of our recruiting command and how they have—to be very honest, it took us a long time. We never thought we would have a recruiting problem in the Coast Guard. And so, it took us a long time to kind of reset the mindset. And they are

extremely active in finding those things that all just naturally happen throughout a country. An inland rivers job fair in Tulsa, Oklahoma, that brings in 3,000 people from high schools, colleges, and trade schools, we send recruiters to events like that. And those are the things that happen all over the country.

Where we are really pouring a lot of focus is—and not to take focus away from the coastal communities where people know us, but now we are trying to get our brand kind of into the heartland where we do live and serve every single day.

As an example, my wife and I, our first unit in the Coast Guard was in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Did not know that when I joined the Coast Guard, but—so, we lived and worked there, and now we are trying to get our brand to be as visible in the heartland as it is on the coast where people know us.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. OK. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. OK. Mr. Van Drew, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Dr. VAN DREW. Thank you, Chairman.

As you know, Training Center Cape May is in my backyard, so, I am acutely aware of the issues that most impact the Coasties' daily lives. We deal with it. Access to medical, schooling, and childcare for the children are in desperate need of being addressed. But perhaps the most impactful is the availability of affordable housing.

Housing costs in general are at an all-time high everywhere in the United States of America. But given that the Service is coastal in nature, the enlisted workforce is resigned to find housing in some of the most expensive, competitive markets in the country. I have constituents now who have had to find more reasonable housing options sometimes over an hour away from where they are located.

The continental United States Cost-of-Living Allowance is a taxable supplemental allowance for U.S. military members designed to help offset the price of living expenses in the highest cost locations in the continental United States. Given the higher costs along the coast, it is evident, to me at least, that an increased CONUS COLA is something that would greatly benefit Coasties and servicemembers stationed in these areas.

Master Chief Jones, thank you for being here today.

I am aware the Coast Guard is concerned with being viewed as receiving preferential treatment. You don't, but I know that we are all concerned always about everything, but this is an avenue for the Coast Guard—is this an avenue—let me say it this way, I believe that we have, but is this an avenue the Coast Guard has explored to help the high costs that are located by these bases?

Master Chief JONES. Thank you, Congressman.

And, yes, sir, we—when it comes to our Basic Allowance for Housing and our Cost-of-Living Allowance, we work hand-in-hand with the Department of Defense on those avenues. We are absolutely—I do believe COLA is an avenue in the continental United States where typically we did not receive COLA in a lot of the CONUS places. That is absolutely an avenue, in addition to working towards it. And thank you to Congress for working to bringing

us back to a Basic Allowance for Housing covering 100 percent of the rental market in an area. We are working to strive towards that.

I will say, in an area like Cape May, as you know well, thanks to your support, that is one of our really good news housing stories, the Coast Guard housing there in Cape May. Our folks absolutely love living there. We have—in Cape May, we have what we call a lot of repeat offenders. They go to Cape May, then they leave kicking and screaming, and they can't wait to come back to Cape May and be assigned there.

But, absolutely, we work hand-in-hand. I spent Monday this week with my DoD counterparts, working with folks from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, on these exact things, housing allowance and COLA.

Dr. VAN DREW. I appreciate it. And hopefully we can work it out. Count me in any way that we can help.

You are right, Cape May is a spectacularly beautiful area. Sometimes people have this vision of New Jersey, and I have the southern one-third of the State geographically, and it is an amazing area, and Cape May is particularly beautiful, but it is particularly expensive as well, as you know.

Training Center Cape May has prepared a draft strategic development plan which identifies potential projects over a 25-year horizon. In a Coast Guard Subcommittee hearing in June, as you probably know, I directly asked Vice Admiral Thomas whether he could commit to sharing this 25-year plan. And his answer was, quote, "If we have it, I don't know why we wouldn't share it," end quote.

So, I requested this, I hope, as you know—if not, I am requesting it again—many times, and I will continue to pursue this. I will continue to inquire about it, want to know about it, about this plan. And the subcommittee, I think, would like to know about it, as well. It is not just for the edification of the subcommittee or for me. Having advanced awareness of the Coast Guard's goals would greatly improve your daily lives, I believe, and the Service.

We as a Congress should be able to see what such a critical asset like Training Center Cape May is going to be doing over the next quarter of a century, and it is unclear to me why the Coast Guard has been unable to share this plan with Members of Congress who work so hard to provide you with what you need.

So, I am going to ask again, I am going to ask again, and I appreciate follow through: Vice Admiral Allan, will you commit to me and this committee that you and your team can provide a copy of the strategic development plan for Training Center Cape May as soon as possible? Or, in all honesty, notify me—and that wouldn't be terrible; we should know, though—if there is not such a plan or if that plan is not operative, it is not functional, if it is something that would just lead us astray, and if it would, then where do we go from there?

Admiral ALLAN. Sir, thank you for that question, and thank you more for the support you are providing to help us change the facilities there.

I would tell you that that is a plan that I am looking into, and it is under development. I think we have some key pieces there as we start talking about the barracks, but we need additional money

just to do some of the planning as we look at the facilities we need for our members there to train and be able to do that year-round.

So, yes, sir, I commit to come over. I will sit with you. I will show you what we have right now, and I will talk to you about where we are going to develop a more comprehensive plan that looks at that whole plan and—

Dr. VAN DREW [interrupting]. And I would appreciate that. So, if you would contact my office—

Admiral ALLAN [interposing]. Yes, sir.

Dr. VAN DREW [continuing]. I would love to look at that and what we could share with the chairman, and the rest of the committee would appreciate that, as well.

As you know, I am supportive. And, quite frankly, for those who haven't been to the barracks—and I will end with this, Chairman. For those that haven't been to the barracks, it does need some help. It does need some work. It could be better, especially for training year-round. Cape May beautiful, but kind of rough in the wintertime.

I appreciate you being here. And I yield back to the chairman.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Now, Mr. Carbajal, you are recognized.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Master Chief Jones, I have had the opportunity to meet with Coasties across the country and the world. I found that the best way to understand the challenges and problems that our Coasties face is to ask the spouses directly.

Since that is a big part of your job, I am going to put you on the spot. What would you say are the top three things the spouses of Coasties would say need to be addressed, changed, augmented? What are the top three things that you hear time and time again?

Master Chief JONES. Thank you, sir.

And, obviously, I am very careful because I know who is sitting right behind me.

And what I normally tell people is, I explain the role of the ombudsman-at-large. When we travel, she doesn't travel as my wife. She travels as the Commandant's ombudsman-at-large. She is the number one advisor to the Commandant of the Coast Guard on all things family. So, I always say, so, I listen to that person very carefully. Happens to be my wife, so, I double listen to that person very carefully.

And what Carol and some of the ombudsmen in the field created for us is the acronym CASH. Very, very simply. So, it is four things, if you will allow me, sir. The CASH, the C is childcare and schools; the A is access to quality mental and physical healthcare; the S is spousal employment; and the H is housing. And without fail, wherever we go, we hear about the CASH. Depending on where you are, where our sentinels live and work, the order will change. But, inevitably, those are the four things that come up, sir.

Mr. CARBAJAL. And very smart, a good way to remember them all when you are being asked about them.

Vice Admiral Allan, suicide is still one of the highest causes of death within the military, whether it is during service or post-separation. So far this year alone in 2024, the Coast Guard has lost eight shipmates.

What is the Coast Guard doing to combat the rise of suicide? And what does the Coast Guard do to care for members who need mental health assistance? I know you briefly touched on this earlier, but if you could expand, I would appreciate it.

Admiral ALLAN. Thank you for that question.

And it is a terrible plague to even have one person in the Service, let alone the eight that we have seen this year.

I think with the help of this committee, we have been able to increase some of those personnel that are going out and providing mental health services to our families. And I think that is important to say just families, because it is not only the Active Duty members that are getting hurt by this issue.

While we concentrate on providing some caregivers there, we also have a tremendous network that we are doing. We have an EAP program that provides six sessions for anyone that is having mental health issues. We provide chaplains out in the field that are walking around, looking at our members, trying to help them. And then I think the most important thing we are doing is we are developing training that we are giving to, not only senior leaders, but those people at the deckplate level, the people you see behind me. Because I think the biggest thing that we can do is provide support and care across our networks of personnel so that they can see when someone is starting to go into crisis and help get them a number of resources that they have.

So, thank you for your support on that.

Master Chief JONES. And if I may, sir, one of the continual barriers that we are just—that keeps me awake at night is removing stigmas associated with saying, I need help. As you see these amazing Americans, they want to be there for everyone else. We have to remember to be there for themselves, and removing some of the misperceptions that if you ask for help, you are—if you are Petty Officer Sizer, that you are not going to be able to fly, or if you go seek help that you are going to lose your security clearance. These are all fallacies. It is not true.

So, it is constant communication into those areas just to tell our workforce it is OK. If you break your ankle, you are going to be laid up for 6 to 8 weeks in a cast, and that is OK. If you are struggling with mental health, that is OK as well.

And then one other addition is, starting in, we are hoping about February, we are going to be moving from our Coast Guard support program to the Military OneSource program that DoD uses, we are getting on the contract there, which is a much better tool for our members and their families especially when it comes in to the mental health.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

Vice Admiral Allan, your testimony recognized the current struggles the Coasties face when it comes to finding affordable housing and housing that is within a reasonable commuting distance.

How much Coast Guard housing exists on base right now, more or less, in some kind of—if you can give us some kind of sense? And how much of that—what approximate amount of that percentage serves the Coast Guard?

Admiral ALLAN. Thank you for that question.

So, I would say the percentage of Coast Guard-owned housing is very small. I can get you that exact percentage. But overall, we mainly rely on BAH. However, we have got to be very deliberate about how we do that. In areas like Kodiak, in areas along the coast, we have to have that kind of housing to be able to provide it. I was the district commander in Boston. Those housing units that we have up in Maine are just essential to what we are doing.

That housing is almost always dedicated to Coast Guard people. We are always trying to keep it up to speed. We are trying to make sure that we are making improvements to people like you that push us to do that in the right places, like Santa Barbara. Thank you very much. That has provided a needed resource for our people.

And I will get you that percentage, sir.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Mr. Babin, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Dr. BABIN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you, Admiral and Master Chief, for being here. And what a treat it was at lunchtime to meet these four brave individuals, and very proud of them, very proud of the Coast Guard.

Southeast Texas, where I represent the 36th Congressional District, I share some very close ties with the Coast Guard from the storm response to keeping a watchful eye on the Houston Ship Channel and beyond. On behalf of my district, I want to thank all of you for keeping our region safe.

I would also like to briefly thank and give a special shout-out to my scheduler, Ms. Avrie Hodges, who is going to be joining your ranks this year as a Coastie. And while we are going to miss her at our office, I have no doubt she is going to do a tremendous job and do great things in the Coast Guard. I am very proud of her, and I am looking forward to seeing her succeed in the next chapter of her life.

So, with that said, my first question is open to whoever would like to answer. Our country is facing new threats, both close at home and around the world. The Coast Guard is uniquely positioned to ensure the safety of America. But, unfortunately, we have heard a lot about challenges in both the recruitment and retainment of servicemembers.

And while I am told things are getting back to normal—and I think I heard that in one of your opening statements or answering a question—would you speak a little bit to the current—I think, if this is still true, we are still 10 percent short. Is there still a 10-percent shortfall?

Please briefly touch on both challenges to recruiting new members as well as challenges to getting Coasties to stick around and stay in the Service. And, in addition, please tell us some of the specific things that Congress can be doing to help alleviate these issues.

Master Chief JONES. Thank you, sir.

And, absolutely, we have made a tremendous dent in the workforce shortage. We were at one point—at the worst, we were close to 5,000 people short. We are now maybe in the 2,500 range. So,

we are making tremendous progress. We are still short, but I want to reassure we are not taking our foot off the gas pedal on this.

Our retention, we have always enjoyed an extremely high retention rate in the Coast Guard. Our mission sells. Our folks love what they do. We did see a slight drop in retention 2021, 2022, 2023 timeframe—or 2021, 2022. In the last 2 years, we have seen it go back to what our normal average retention rates are.

A lot of philosophies on why that is, sir. One that may be is that was kind of the 20-year mark for those that joined after 9/11. Great Americans signed up, served their country for 20 years, and retired.

One of the things that I am really keeping a keen eye on, and we spent a lot of time talking with my DoD counterparts on Monday about is, now we are on the—kind of on the first round of people being eligible to get out of the military that have the blended retirement system. We don't know if that is going to impact or not impact.

So, what we believe at the end of the day and what we are keenly focused on is the culture of our Service, the mission of our Service. Our people love what they do. And as long as our people serve at a unit where they feel like that they are trusted, valued, empowered, and included for themselves personally and themselves professionally, their families, and we can provide them the things that they need to make it easier for them to Coast Guard, then we are pretty proud of the product we have, sir.

Dr. BABIN. Thank you very, very much.

My next question—and this is a little off topic for today—but it is a technical question, and it has to do with my district.

In either case—in case either of you are up to speed on the situation with the Coast Guard MH-60 helicopter issues, the Coast Guard has recently made it known that the MH-60 Jayhawk's maximum flight-hours have been reduced from 20,000 to 19,000 hours. And now, eight helicopters have been taken out of service, and more will be removed as they reach 19,000 hours.

What sort of operational impact is the reduced helicopter fleet having on your operations? How will the reduction in maximum flight-hours impact the Service's plan to transition to an all MH-60 fleet?

If we have a little more time, I want to finish up too with something else.

Admiral ALLAN. Yes, sir. Thank you for that question.

Providing the right assets and safe assets to our personnel is the Coast Guard's number one priority. We have got to make sure that they are safe so that they come back.

When we start looking at the 60s and what we are doing, we have run them very long. Most of the other services are not running them past 10,000 hours or past 12,000 hours. We now have a large majority of our fleet approaching 19,000 hours.

In recent discussions with the OEM Sikorsky, they alerted us to some information to start talking about what is the safe upper limit for those aircraft that they are operating. So, out of an abundance of caution, we took a pause. We are holding those aircraft that are above 19,000 hours on the ground until we can do a full assessment, and that is what we are currently in the process of

doing, to understand where that is and how that will affect, not only our near-term goals for operational readiness, but our long strategic plans.

Dr. BABIN. My time is expired, so, I will yield back.

Thank you very much, Admiral and Master Chief.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you.

Mrs. Peltola, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. PELTOLA. Thank you, Chairman Webster.

Most of my questions have already been asked, but I wanted to ask you about childcare. I consider childcare a workforce issue, and I wonder if you could talk a little bit about improvements made to your childcare situation.

Master Chief JONES. Yes, thank you so much.

Obviously, childcare—anything we talk about in the CASH world that I spoke from the ombudsman-at-large, it is a direct tie to readiness. Because when our members are worried about things at home not being taken care of, they are not focused on doing the dangerous missions that we ask them to do.

In the childcare world, it is not a one size fits all. In some places, the answer is, Congress supports and we build and fund a brick-and-mortar child development center that the Coast Guard runs. In some places, it is working to get equal or better access to DoD facilities. And in quite a few places, it is the childcare subsidies that you all have worked so hard to give us. And we thank you so much for that.

The next key step in the childcare subsidies piece is we are currently working an MOA with the Navy. Congress gave us the ability to not necessarily have to pay those childcare subsidies to a certain provider but to be able to pay them directly to the member. So, we are working an MOA with the Navy. And as soon as we get that done, then the subsidies could be paid straight to the member, then the member can decide to bring someone in their home or whatever. So, it is those flexible options in there are the best approach to childcare.

Mrs. PELTOLA. Thank you.

In the last few years, I have had the opportunity to get to know a couple of your enlisted members, and one of the things that has impressed me are the myriad training opportunities that you have. And I wonder—I heard about one training that was to be a victim's advocate. Another training was deescalation of volatile situations. And I don't know what exactly kind of program you have, but could you talk about some of the training opportunities that you give your enlisted folks?

Master Chief JONES. Absolutely. One of the amazing—as you heard from all of the members today at lunch, what enabled them to do those amazing specific cases they talked about with their work every day is the training, I think. And what I heard from them was they relied on their training, they trusted their training, they trusted the training of their shipmates, and they went out and they did great things.

Like you mentioned victim advocates, Jess is a victim advocate at her unit. So, a lot of what we have are trainings that are inherent to the Coast Guard. We have formal school training. Obviously, Cape May is the basic training, then the A school, which is where

people go for their formal rating training, and then we have C schools, just a myriad of C schools both on the officer and enlisted side, that train members to the daily jobs.

But I will tell you where I am the proudest of our workforce is a lot of what we do is daily on-the-job training. And they have formalized PQ, or personnel qualification, standards that they follow as they are doing this training. But a lot of what they do is that on-the-job training. The boat crews that you hear, the rescue swimmer, the Fast Response Cutter out doing its missions is executed in that format of the on-the-job training.

Mrs. PELTOLA. Thank you.

And you also really help young people figure out their finances, do long-term planning for retirement. There aren't many organizations that provide this kind of support for young people, and I just really want to commend you on that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. The gentlelady yields back.

Mr. Ezell, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I thank you all again for being here today. And we so enjoyed spending our time with you at lunch, and appreciate your shared stories with us.

It is always good to be around you folks because you just make the room and the world a better place. But every time I come away from being around you, I am more impressed. You defend more than 100,000 miles of U.S. coastline, and a lot of that is in my district. And I just can't thank you for all that you do enough.

I hope that some of these discussions that we are having today will bring a little light on how much the Coast Guard does with little resources. It is admirable. And I want to make sure, as much as I can, to make sure you have everything you can to be successful in your jobs.

Vice Admiral, you testified, "Our people are our most valuable resource." I agree with you wholeheartedly. These men and women answer the daily call to protect us.

Can you elaborate a little more on the strength of your people and the workforce, especially as we face recruitment and retention issues across all the services?

Admiral ALLAN. Yes, sir. Thank you for that question.

I think as we talk a lot in the Coast Guard and we get asked about things, we talk about the great ships that we are building, where they are being delivered from, and how they are doing it. But I have got to tell you, it is a piece of steel until we put a Coast Guard crew on there that brings them to life that then executes the missions that we need.

That said, I think we are providing what the Nation needs. Sometimes I worry about the resources we are providing to give the crews the Coast Guard has and what they need to be able to do that mission every day.

So, with the help of Congress, especially with this committee, we just appreciate all things that you are doing to help with those intangibles—that training, childcare, housing—that is so important to keep their mind on the mission and not worried about how their family is doing, how they are going to get medical. We within the

Coast Guard have a lot of work to do to make that better for them, but we appreciate your partnership in doing it.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you.

The Coast Guard recently introduced a Talent Acquisition rating. What were some of the positives from that program, and how can we help you get it improved?

Master Chief JONES. Thank you for that question, sir.

And I think I mentioned this earlier, we were the only branch of the military that did not have people dedicated to recruiting as a profession. You would take any one of these four amazing members sitting behind me, they would go do their tour at their unit, then they can go to what we call the special assignment, go be a recruiter for 3 or 4 years or 4 years, and then have to go back into their rating because they need to do what they need to do there to advance.

And what we found, in one case 2 years ago, a boatswain's mate first class was the top recruiter in the Coast Guard, and she loved it and she wanted to keep doing it, but she needed to go back afloat and get some boatswain's mate qual so she could advance to chief petty officer. So, we finally realized, hey, let's give these folks the opportunity. Because when they do that 4-year tour, it is year 3 when they really get kicking and they really get good at what they are doing. So, establishing the Talent Acquisition rating is the best way to get about it.

We are starting—that is not something that you can come in from boot camp and then go to an A school. We are going to require that—right now, we are requiring the E-6 level, I mean, you kind of need to know the product you are selling, get out and live it a little bit. But we are looking to maybe expand that to the second-class level to equal our diver rating. But it is something that every recruiter I talk to is really considering, lateraling over into that rating, they love their job.

Mr. EZELL. Very good. I would like to hear a little more about your personal story and how we can use those stories like yours and Vice Admiral Allan's to help address some of the challenges that you have today. And why did you join the Coast Guard?

Master Chief JONES. The greatest decision I ever made in my life was to ask this lady behind me to marry me. The greatest decision we ever made was joining the Coast Guard.

Mr. EZELL. Very good.

Master Chief JONES. And quite frankly, I turned 23 in boot camp. So, I had bounced around. I won't list how many freshman years of college I did before joining the Coast Guard. But I remember vividly one day my father came to me and he goes, hey, you really like this girl, Carol. I said, Dad, I love her. And he goes, you better figure it out because she is too good for you, you are going nowhere. So, I needed something. And I have a great relationship with my dad. But it was that kick-start.

And I joined the Coast Guard thinking I was going to do 4 years and get out, and probably a lot of us have that story. And here I am almost three decades later and, unfortunately, in 2 years, they are going to have to send me home, kicking and screaming. We have loved every minute of every day. And when I told you all be-

fore I have the greatest job in the world, you got to see at lunch, I am not making that up. I have the greatest job in the world.

Mr. EZELL. I certainly believe that just watching the testimonies and the stories that were told. I felt the same way in the police force when I joined. I was going to do my 20 years, and 42 years later I retired and got elected to Congress. So, anyway. Thank you all. It has been a wonderful day to be around you and to hear your testimonies.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. The gentleman yields back.

Ms. Scholten, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you, sir.

And thank you so much to our witnesses, Vice Admiral Allan and Master Chief Jones. So good to see you again. And I am just so grateful to you both for your service to our country. I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge Carol and her service as well and commitment. We should have her here up on the witness stand for many of these. Nobody knows more about the life of a Coastie than our supportive spouses.

I am incredibly fortunate, as you know, to represent Coast Guard stations in Grand Haven and Muskegon. And as we discussed, it is clear how the Coast Guard can provide fulfilling service-oriented work. I know from meeting with them firsthand that our hard-working Coasties are dedicated to safeguarding hundreds of thousands of miles of U.S. coastline, both inland, as well as helping mariners in need. However, the Coast Guard continues to struggle. Even though numbers are up in recruiting, we are not near the level that we need to. And we know that a huge part of this is understanding the stability of the job.

As we are slated to narrowly avoid a Government shutdown this week, it is top of mind as I think about the fact that, in 2019, the lapse in appropriations hit our Coasties so hard, and their families, who didn't receive a paycheck in those critical 30-plus days. This is precisely why I introduced the Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act, to ensure that the Coast Guard is appropriately compensated for their work during Government shutdowns, just as other military service branches are and have been.

For both of you, how could commonsense bills like the Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act level the playing field among different military branches and bolster potential recruitment prospects?

As well as, Master Chief Jones, you talked about the mental health aspects of this. I think about just the dignity and respect that we owe it to our Coasties to make sure that they are paid in the event of a shutdown. So, those two aspects, sir.

Master Chief JONES. I will go first, if it is OK, ma'am. Thank you so much. Great to see you again, as well.

What I learned in 2019 with the lapse in appropriation was that our workforce—I didn't learn—I knew they were the greatest in the world. But what I learned is they will run through a brick wall for us and for the Nation. All they want to know is what is on the other side. And what I learned very clearly is the one thing that will bring our workforce to their knees is the unknown.

And they knew we would eventually be paid. I mean, everyone knew that, but the fear in the eyes when we are going and talking

to our members. And I think the sense of disappointment, the sense of feeling let down. And the biggest concern that we have as an organization is they still came to work and did their job every day, but were they as effective as they could have been, because their minds were worried on, I can't pay this bill, can I get groceries, those things.

And as I said earlier, resilience in our workforce, readiness in our workforce is all about having them, when they come to work, being fully focused on a mission, because in every story you heard at lunchtime, what any one of them will tell you is, I happened to be the one on duty that day, they kind of aw-shucks it away how amazing they are. I get the privilege of bragging on them all the time. But that could be this afternoon, that could be tomorrow, that could be at any time for any of them. So, we need them to know that the things at home are taken care of. So, we thank you very much for that support.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Yes, absolutely.

Admiral ALLAN. Thank you for that question.

I would say, when you talk to Coast Guard people, they joined for the mission, they joined for the service of Nation, they joined for the adventure. They do not join because we are paying them so much, right. And so, even while we push forward to have better programs to make sure they are financially responsible, understand, too many of our people live paycheck to paycheck.

At the beginning of this hearing, we talked a little bit about how dispersed our workforce is compared to DoD. In DoD, if you are in housing, it doesn't matter if you don't have your BAH. In many cases, our people, they didn't get BAH and they were being threatened to be moved out of their houses.

We are geographically operating across the globe every day, many times along our DoD partners. And it was, I have got to tell you, very tough for some of our young petty officers to not be getting paid while standing shoulder to shoulder to someone over in Bahrain that was getting paid, and their wife, their spouse, their family member didn't need to have.

So, thank you for your focus on that. Thank you for helping it but very important issue for the Coast Guard.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you so much.

Over two centuries of service standing strong for us, you deserve the same from your Government to make sure that you guys are ready and able to serve. Look forward to celebrating your birthday with you later today. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. OK. Well, I want to thank both of our witnesses for coming, and the others in the Coast Guard for coming, watching your Government work, and it is really good to have you here today.

The subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:20 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]