

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION  
REQUEST FOR APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL  
YEAR 2024 AND THE FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE  
PROGRAM**

---

---

**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

ON

**S. 2226**

TO AUTHORIZE APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024 FOR MILITARY  
ACTIVITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, FOR MILITARY CON-  
STRUCTION, AND FOR DEFENSE ACTIVITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT  
OF ENERGY. TO PRESCRIBE MILITARY PERSONNEL STRENGTHS FOR  
SUCH FISCAL YEAR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

---

**PART 6  
PERSONNEL**

---

MARCH 15, 2023



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION REQUEST FOR APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024 AND THE FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE PROGRAM—Part 6  
PERSONNEL

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION  
REQUEST FOR APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL  
YEAR 2024 AND THE FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE  
PROGRAM**

---

---

**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

ON

**S. 2226**

TO AUTHORIZE APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024 FOR MILITARY  
ACTIVITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, FOR MILITARY CON-  
STRUCTION, AND FOR DEFENSE ACTIVITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT  
OF ENERGY. TO PRESCRIBE MILITARY PERSONNEL STRENGTHS FOR  
SUCH FISCAL YEAR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

---

**PART 6**

**PERSONNEL**

---

MARCH 15, 2023

---

Printed for the use of the Committee on Armed Services



Available via: <http://www.govinfo.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

JACK REED, Rhode Island, *Chairman*

JEANNE SHAHEEN, New Hampshire	ROGER F. WICKER, Mississippi
KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, New York	DEB FISCHER, Nebraska
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, Connecticut	TOM COTTON, Arkansas
MAZIE K. HIRONO, Hawaii	MIKE ROUNDS, South Dakota
TIM KAINE, Virginia	JONI ERNST, Iowa
ANGUS S. KING, Jr., Maine	DAN SULLIVAN, Alaska
ELIZABETH WARREN, Massachusetts	KEVIN CRAMER, North Dakota
GARY C. PETERS, Michigan	RICK SCOTT, Florida
JOE MANCHIN III, West Virginia	TOMMY TUBERVILLE, Alabama
TAMMY DUCKWORTH, Illinois	MARKWAYNE MULLIN, Oklahoma
JACKY ROSEN, Nevada	TED BUDD, North Carolina
MARK KELLY, Arizona	ERIC SCHMITT, Missouri

ELIZABETH L. KING, *Staff Director*

JOHN P. KEAST, *Minority Staff Director*

---

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL

ELIZABETH WARREN, Massachusetts, *Chair*

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, Connecticut	RICK SCOTT, Florida
MAZIE K. HIRONO, Hawaii	MIKE ROUNDS, South Dakota
TIM KAINE, Virginia	DAN SULLIVAN, Alaska
TAMMY DUCKWORTH, Illinois	TED BUDD, North Carolina

# CONTENTS

MARCH 15, 2023

	Page
MILITARY AND CIVILIAN PERSONNEL PROGRAMS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE .....	1
MEMBER STATEMENTS	
Statement of Senator Elizabeth Warren .....	1
Statement of Senator Rick Scott .....	3
WITNESS STATEMENTS	
Cisneros, Hon. Gilbert R., Jr., Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Accommodated by Hon. Lester Martinez-Lopez Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs; Hon. Shawn G. Skelly, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness; Mr. Thomas A. Constable, Performing to Duties of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs; Ms. Elizabeth B. Foster, Executive Director of Force Resiliency .....	7
Schaefer, Hon. Agnes G., Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs .....	44
Parker, Hon. Franklin R., Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs .....	50
Wagner, Alex, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs .....	55
Questions for the Record .....	68



**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION  
REQUEST FOR APPROPRIATIONS FOR  
FISCAL YEAR 2024 AND THE FUTURE YEARS  
DEFENSE PROGRAM**

---

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 2023**

UNITED STATES SENATE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL,  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,  
*Washington, DC.*

**MILITARY AND CIVILIAN PERSONNEL PROGRAMS IN  
THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:58 p.m., in room 222, Russell Senate Office Building, Senator Elizabeth Warren (Chairman of the Subcommittee) presiding.

Subcommittee Members present: Senators Warren, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, Duckworth, Kelly, Scott, Sullivan, Budd, and Wicker.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR ELIZABETH WARREN**

Senator WARREN. Good afternoon, and welcome to the first Personnel Subcommittee hearing of the 118th Congress. I am pleased to welcome all of you here to this hearing to receive testimony on the military and civilian personnel programs at the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Military Services in review of the Administration's defense authorization request for fiscal year 2024.

All three of my brothers served in the military, so supporting the military and military families means a lot to me, and I am particularly pleased to be chairing my first hearing as an Armed Services Subcommittee Chair.

I am honored to chair this Subcommittee and I look forward to continuing its long history of bipartisanship and working as a partner with Ranking Member Scott and with all of our Members on both sides of the aisle to improve the lives of our servicemembers, of retirees, military families, and the civilian workforce.

Our annual posture hearing provides the Department the opportunity to discuss their personnel policy priorities for the coming year. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the All-Volunteer Force.

In today's hearing, I would like to focus on how we welcome young people into the military, how we support families who continue to serve, and how the military contributes to our communities.

The Administration's National Defense Strategy gets it exactly right in prioritizing servicemembers. We must do this to address one of the military's greatest challenges, the ongoing struggle to meet its recruiting goals.

Today, only the Marine Corps and the Space Force are meeting their recruiting targets. Meanwhile, the Army is set to miss its target by tens of thousands of soldiers, and the Navy has recently lowered its requirements and standards for many ratings in order to address anticipated shortfalls.

The most direct way to address this shortfall is by making sure that we are taking care of military personnel and their families. This is just as much a readiness issue as our supply of tanks and missiles and material to fight on land and at sea. So, where to start?

Well, I have a lot of work that I want to propose for this Subcommittee, including protecting and enhancing health care, continuing to build on Senator Gillibrand's leadership in addressing sexual assault, and combating the corrosive impact of the revolving door between senior Pentagon officials and defense contractors, and foreign governments.

I also look forward to working with the Readiness Subcommittee to be certain that U.S. military families are not living in unsafe and unsanitary housing conditions. I have done extensive investigative work here, and I have worked with other Committee Members on bipartisan legislation.

For today's hearing, I have picked three items to begin with, access to childcare, medical debt, and the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps, or JROTC. First, childcare. Accessing childcare remains a problem for all families, military and civilian.

We must modernize and improve the way the DOD ensures that servicemembers and their families have access to childcare, and I am happy to work with any Member of the Committee, Democrat or Republican, who has good, smart, creative ideas on how to do that.

Second, I want to take a good, hard look at medical debt and how it affects both members of the military and civilians. I want to ask specifically about implementation of my amendments, along with Joaquin Castro, to the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act to provide DOD the authority to waive civilian debts for military hospitals, a bill that was intended to keep our doctors sharp without sticking patients with big private bills.

I won't get to cover it today, but I am also concerned about servicemembers who have TRICARE but who still get stuck with medical bills they are expected to pay on their own, and finally, I have questions about the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps, or JROTC, particularly about reports of sexual assault of our children.

We have much to do to better support military families. I look forward to getting to work on these issues and many more, and I will now turn to Ranking Member Scott for his comments to open this hearing. Thank you. Ranking Member Scott.

**STATEMENT OF SENATOR RICK SCOTT**

Senator SCOTT. Thank you, Chair Warren. As this is the first meeting of the Personnel Subcommittee this Congress, let me begin by saying that I am very much looking forward to working with Senator Warren as we continue the bipartisan tradition of the Armed Services Committee in developing the National Defense Authorization Act.

I am on four committees, and this is my first subcommittee to be the Ranking Member, and I want to say that the Armed Services Committee is the one committee that actually works well together. I think we are going to continue to do a great job with the National Defense Authorization Act again this year.

Every Member here is united in supporting our men and women in uniform and their families. This Subcommittee has a long history of prioritizing the well-being and morale of our servicemembers. I am eager to be continuing that work as the new Ranking Member. Today, the military faces, as we all know, a recruiting crisis.

If current trends continue, the Army, Navy, and Air Force will fail to achieve their recruiting missions this year. The Army and Navy look like they will miss the mark by over 10,000 recruits each. Well, this could be only the third time in history the Air Force has failed to meet its recruiting mission.

This situation is unprecedented in the 50-year history of the All-Volunteer Force, and this Subcommittee must make it our top priority to do whatever we can to fix it. I am concerned that in the midst of this challenging recruiting environment, the Navy has decided to lower enlistment standards.

We have seen this approach tried before. It had disastrous results. I am a Navy veteran myself. I joined at the age of 18. I probably did more swabbing the decks and cleaning the latrines than I did being a radarman. I am also the son of a World War II veteran who fought—who was one of 3,000 people that did all full combat and jumps with the 82d Airborne.

Also fought in the Battle of the Bulge. I know that no job in military is easy or unimportant. When ships catch fire or in collision, as has happened repeatedly in the recent past, every sailor must know how to respond to save lives.

When enlistment standards drop below certain levels, we have seen increased morale and discipline problems, which are accompanied by lower unit readiness. These are not acceptable outcomes.

I hope to use this hearing to learn more about what the Navy is doing to avoid the mistakes of the past in this area. The good news is that as difficult as recruiting is right now, retention levels are generally quite high. That means once people join the military, they tend to like it and want to stay.

Military families in particular have higher retention rates than single servicemembers. This is supported by DOD surveys that report married servicemembers with children have the highest levels of satisfaction with the military way of life. So, we need to ask ourselves why is there such a disconnect between recruiting struggles and retention successes, and what can we do to bridge that gap.

As we continue working to ensure servicemembers and their families enjoy high quality of life in the military, we need to do more

to share their inspiring stories with the rest of the country. Effective use of marketing and advertising must be a priority right now and we need to resource it accordingly.

The Department of Defense should also be an advocate for the many benefits that come with military service. For example, we know that veterans have lower unemployment rates and higher rates of homeownership, marriage, educational achievement.

Military service sets young men and women on the path to a great life and we need more people to know that. So, we have major issues facing our military, and this Subcommittee stands ready to tackle them.

That is why I was excited to take the position as Ranking Member, because there are real issues like housing, childcare, recruitment, and health care that demand our attention. These aren't Republican or Democrat issues. There are things that this Committee has and must continue to work on, on a bipartisan basis, to fix so our military members and their families are taken care of.

This Committee did this last Congress to better protect against and prevent sexual assault. Working together on these issues—important issues allow us to best serve those who serve and protect our Nation.

That is why I was incredibly disappointed when I finally received Secretary Cisneros prepared statement, of several witnesses last night at 10 p.m., and found that a major focus of the Pentagon, I am sure probably at the urging of the White House, was prioritizing DEI [diversity, equity and inclusion], virtually cultural war issues.

I have run big companies. I know the importance of ensuring that we have a workplace, whether in the military or elsewhere, where people can come to their jobs without the threat of being disrespected or discriminated against. But when it comes to our armed forces, the top question should be, is every person who wants to join solely focused on the mission of intimidating the hell out of our enemies and defeating them if necessary.

It is not about hitting diversity quotas. It is about being the most lethal military fighting force on the planet because the folks who wear the uniform are warfighters, unapologetically devoted to protecting American values, putting that above all else.

Our Commanders know this, and I am gravely concerned that this Administration is forcing them to move away from that to achieve some diversity metric that isn't based on enhancing the lethal fighting capabilities of the American military.

We are creating nice talking points for the Administration to tout race and gender instead of fighting power and strength. Do I believe that our military should reflect America and be made up of fighters as diverse as places like my home State of Florida, you better believe it.

But to assert that diversity quotas and pronoun training are more important than the basic needs of recruitment and retention or caring for the needs of our current force by ensuring proper access to childcare, good housing, health care is outrageous, and I think everybody in this room knows that.

I look forward to getting to the real issues, solving problems, taking care of our members and their families. That will be my focus

as Ranking Member of this Subcommittee. Thank you to each of the witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee today, and I look forward to your testimony.

Senator HIRONO. Senator Wicker, I understand you wish to make a statement.

Senator WICKER. Yes, ma'am, I do, and I appreciate that. I had intended to attend this Subcommittee hearing to talk solely about Junior ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps]. But I do have to address the matter that the distinguished Ranking Member of the Subcommittee just raised, and that is the submitted statement by the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

I do hope that this statement is not a reflection of the Department's priorities, because if it is, I am very concerned. We have a military recruiting problem, as the Chair mentioned, as the Ranking Member mentioned. It should be at the top of our list.

Yet this statement of some 26 pages, let me make sure I have got it right, some 26 pages does not get to recruiting until page 20 of the statement. Instead, topics like abortion and diversity, equity and inclusion are addressed in those first 20 pages.

I don't understand why the Department feels that is necessary to change the culture of the military by, "inculcating diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, DEIA, principals across the Department efforts."

As a veteran, as a ROTC commissioned officer, as a former member of the Air Force Reserve, I can tell you the United States military has been decades ahead of the rest of our society in inclusion.

I have said publicly many times, the United States military is the greatest civil rights program in the history of the world, and I am proud that they have been ahead of our society on that.

When some of my colleagues criticize the Department for misplaced priorities, Mr. Secretary, I think that is what—this concern that I have, and the Ranking Member has, are what they are talking about.

Now, with regard to Junior ROTC, in my home State of Mississippi, the program is a pillar in the development of future leaders. Over the years, I have passed legislation to expand the number of JROTC units as a part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), increased funding for the program, and grow the population of veterans who are eligible to be Junior ROTC instructors.

Junior ROTC helps our Nation's high schoolers reach more of their full potential to become successful citizens. A RAND Report, A RAND Corporation report found, and I quote, "there is consensus that JROTC participation has both academic and nonacademic benefits for students."

According to this very comprehensive and scholarly report, most of these benefits go to economically disadvantaged schools and the students of those schools. In addition to these benefits, the report noted that JROTC provides, "volunteer opportunities that allow students to benefit the larger community."

In my conversations with superintendents, principals, and parents, when I ask, if you would like to have Junior ROTC in your school, I have never run into a superintendent or a principal that said other than, yes, I very much am glad we have Junior ROTC or I would like to have a Junior ROTC program.

This moment presents us with an opportunity to address a claim in recent news articles about JROTC. This reporting suggests that JROTC instructors commit sexual misconduct at much higher rates than civilian teachers. I very much doubt that assertion. There is simply no data available to support that.

Sexual misconduct toward students is never acceptable, and the JROTC program understands this, and every instance of misconduct involving JROTC, the military immediately suspended the instructor. But I will also say this to my fellow Senators, Junior ROTC makes an easy target in this area because the Department of Defense is a central repository of information and is subject to strict oversight.

So, there is a lot of information about JROTC. On the other hand, the information in public school systems is diffuse since the systems are large, sprawling, and decentralized. We know school districts often do not publicly disclose cases of teacher sexual misconduct. It is just a fact. It is such a problem that last year the Department of Education released a report on the issue and found only 20 states have laws on the books that prohibit suppressing information regarding school employee sexual misconduct.

We don't get all the facts, but no one would suggest that we do away with public schools simply because there is some misconduct on the part of a very few members of the faculty. If anything, there is every reason to believe that Junior ROTC is a safer environment than others for our future leaders.

Junior ROTC instructors receive twice the screening, twice the screening, of a normal teacher before they enter the classroom, both from the military and the school district. Given this extra scrutiny, I am highly skeptical of the idea that JROTC instructors are more likely to commit misconduct.

Congress should be mindful of the highly positive, highly positive impact of Junior ROTC. In fact, it is celebrated on both sides of the aisle on this Committee. My colleague from Massachusetts, Senator Warren, is to be thanked for raising this issue and has taken a substantive and helpful interest in JROTC.

As she reenters the room, I thank her for that. I will carry our shared work forward by introducing additional legislation this year that would further expand Junior ROTC to the hundreds of schools currently on the waiting list for a program.

I hope to have many partners in this effort, and I look forward to working with Senator Warren and the Ranking Member, Senator Scott, as we approach this year's NDAA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator WARREN. Thank you, and do you have a statement you would like to make, Senator? All right, good. So, to our witnesses, thank you for appearing. We have two panels today. The first panel consists of officials from the Office of the Secretary of Defense who will cover the full range of military and civilian personnel programs.

The Honorable Gil Cisneros, Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. Dr. Lester Martinez Lopez, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs. Ms. Shawn Skelly, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness. Mr. Tom Constable, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs,

and Ms. Elizabeth Foster, Executive Director, Office of Force Resiliency.

Welcome to all of you. Appreciate your being here. The second panel will consist of the Assistant Secretaries of the military departments for Manpower and Reserve Affairs. We will have Ms. Agnes Schaefer, Assistant Secretary of the Army. Mr. Franklyn Parker, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and Mr. Alex Wagner, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force.

Again, thank you all for appearing here. Undersecretary Cisneros, I understand that you are going to deliver an opening statement on behalf of the first panel, is that right? Then you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE GILBERT R. CISNEROS, JR., UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND READINESS ACCOMMODATED BY THE HONORABLE LESTER MARTINEZ-LOPEZ ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR HEALTH AFFAIRS; THE HONORABLE SHAWN G. SKELLY, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR READINESS; MR. THOMAS A. CONSTABLE, PERFORMING TO DUTIES OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS; MS. ELIZABETH B. FOSTER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FORCE RESILIENCY**

Mr. CISNEROS. Thank you. Chairwoman Warren, Ranking Member Scott, Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department of Defense's greatest strength, our people.

On behalf of the entire team, I think the Committee for your support of the 2.3 million Active and Reserve component servicemembers, and over 900,000 civilians who defend our Nation and the families who serve alongside them.

This year is an especially momentous year as the Department celebrates the 75th anniversary of President Truman's order to integrate the armed forces, as well as the 50th anniversary of the All-Volunteer Force.

Both of these events are responsible for creating the most unrivaled fighting force in history. Near the beginning of his tenure, Secretary Austin laid out three priorities to ensure our military is capable of meeting any current and future threats, defending the Nation, taking care of our people, and succeed through teamwork.

I have established four overarching priorities that are foundational to all the P&R's efforts, change the culture, promote the health, well-being, and safety of the force and families, cultivate talent management, and advance strategic readiness.

In changing the culture, the Department understands the trust is key to the preserving our All-Volunteer Force. We thank Congress for its support to providing the full amount of the Department's fiscal year 2023 budget requests in support of the recommendations of the independent review commission on sexual assault in the military.

We are making progress toward implementing—implementation of all approved IRC recommendations, and your support for fiscal year 2024 budget request would ensure we complete this historic

reforms to the military justice, field a specialized prevention workforce, train and equip response personnel, and empower survivors to recovery.

We are also ensuring diversity, equity, and inclusion accessibility principles are applied across the Department's efforts. We want to leverage the strength of all of our people, advance opportunity, remove barriers, and ensure everyone within the Department of Defense is treated with dignity and respect.

With regard to promoting the health, well-being, and safety of the force and families, we know the global pandemic economic pressures such as inflation and operational tempo make it more important than ever to focus on training and taking care of our people.

Thanks to Congress's support, our servicemembers and civilians received a 4.6 basic pay raise at the beginning of this year, and the Fiscal Year 2023 President's Budget includes a 5.2 percent pay raise for 2024.

These pay raises are critical to recruiting and retaining the all-volunteer force. Secretary Austin directed the creation of the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee to conduct a comprehensive review. This Committee's report was published in late February and the Department is carefully reviewing the recommendations.

Every death by suicide is a tragedy and weighs heavily on the military community. We are tackling these issues with focused attention and dedication. With regard to cultivating talent management, recruiting challenges will persist, but we are looking for ways to galvanize our future servicemembers on the values of military service.

The Department is implementing a comprehensive outreach strategy that includes partnerships with other agencies such as the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, and Selective Service that touts the benefits of public service to our Nation and our communities. We are also working on efforts to dispel inaccuracies and educate both our youth and their influencers through a national military advertising campaign.

We ask for your support in the Fiscal Year 2024 Presidential Budget requests, which includes \$40 million for our joint marketing campaign. With P&R's fourth priority, advancing strategic readiness, we are ensuring we can build, maintain, and balance warfighting capabilities and competitive advantage to achieve strategic objectives across threat and time horizons. This includes updating our professional military and education to make it more effective and relevant to the National Defense Strategy.

As we look to the future, it is imperative that we do not take for granted what makes our U.S. military unparalleled and unmatched. It is our people, the Active Reserve, National Guard, DOD civilians, and all of their families who are willing to serve this country. They are the bedrock of our national security.

Thank you for your continued support of our servicemembers, their families, and we look forward to your questions.

JOINT PREPARED STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE GILBERT R. CISNEROS, JR., THE HONORABLE LESTER MARTINEZ LOPEZ, THE HONORABLE SHAWN SKELLY, MR. THOMAS CONSTABLE, AND MS. BETH FOSTER

Chairwoman Warren, Ranking Member Scott, and Members of the Personnel Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you, along with the other leaders of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness (OUSD(P&R)), to discuss the Department of Defense's greatest strength and achievement—our people. We are proud to represent the 2.3 million Active and Reserve component servicemembers and over 900,000 DOD civilians who defend our Nation every day, and the families, caregivers, and survivors who serve alongside them. And 2023 is a very significant year for the Department of Defense as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of President Truman's order to racially desegregate and congressional action to allow women to serve in the Armed Forces as well as the 50th anniversary of the All-Volunteer Force. These significant events were directly responsible for creating the most unrivaled fighting force in history.

In order for us to succeed in an ever changing landscape of threats and challenges, both international and domestic, Secretary Austin laid out three priorities for the Department—Defend the Nation, Take Care of Our People, and Succeed Through Teamwork. Understanding that our people are at the core of Secretary Austin's priorities, P&R established four overarching priorities that are foundational to P&R's efforts: Change the Culture; Promote the Health, Well-being, and Safety of the Force and Families; Cultivate Talent Management; and Advance Strategic Readiness.

#### CHANGE THE CULTURE

Trust in the military is crucial to preserving the legacy and effectiveness of our All-Volunteer Force. In order to gain the trust of servicemembers, their families, civilian employees, and the public, the Department focuses on supporting our forces' ability to accomplish their mission by decreasing the prevalence of sexual assault, sexual harassment and other destructive behavior, inculcating diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) principles across all Department efforts, and ensuring servicemembers and families, and civilian employees are protected against bias and discrimination. Addressing these issues is critical to our values, maintaining cohesive and strong units, and ensuring our overall military readiness and leadership on the global stage.

#### *Countering Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment*

Sexual assault and sexual harassment are not only a threat to our readiness, but contrary to everything we stand for. It has a devastating impact on the whole military community and erodes the trust of our All-Volunteer Force. In order to bring about change, the Department is making significant investments to properly and effectively counter sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military.

Secretary Austin made countering sexual assault a priority on his first day on the job as it is one of the most challenging issues we face. The entire Department continues to work collaboratively—across Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) Components, Military Departments, and the National Guard Bureau to operationalize the Secretary's implementation guidance for recommendations from the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military (IRC).

We are making progress toward implementation of all approved IRC recommendations. This past year, we began implementing the most significant changes to the military justice system in decades when the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and the Department of the Air Force achieved initial operational capability in standing up their respective Offices of Special Trial Counsel (OSTC). Each OSTC is led by a Senate-confirmed one-star Lead Special Trial Counsel supervised directly by the Military Department's Secretary, without intervening authority. The OSTCs are on track to reach full operational capability by December 2023. These changes place prosecution decisions for sexual assault, domestic violence, and other named offenses in the hands of trained, experienced, and independent military attorneys who report outside the command structure, and only to the civilian Secretaries of the Military Departments. Implementation also includes building a career track for military justice for judge advocates in each of the Services, to enable the development of a sustained cadre of these specialized prosecutors across the Force. In 2025, these Special Trial Counsel will importantly also assume jurisdiction over sexual harassment.

We are also making progress in fielding a new full-time and specialized prevention workforce to avert these crimes before they occur. We have established guidance and infrastructure, and hiring for the 2,000-plus workforce continues,

prioritizing on the highest risk locations and positions that will establish policy and processes for the workforce. Additionally, we have trained 1,200 collateral-duty prevention personnel. The Department is also working to professionalize the sexual assault response workforce to provide them with enhanced skills and the independence required to better assist victim recovery. We are revising policy and training to provide Sexual Assault Response Coordinators and Sexual Assault Prevention Response Victim Advocates with greater independence and expertise to foster support and provide victim care. We are also working to identify supportive services and victim advocacy for victims of sexual harassment, as the IRC also recommended, recognizing the corrosive impacts of sexual harassment on unit climate, cohesion and morale in addition to the harms experienced by individual victims, including the significant increased risk for sexual assault within units that have high rates of sexual harassment. Further, we are working to strengthen accountability, prevention and victim support for cyberharassment across the force.

We continue to use On-Site Installation Evaluations (OSIEs) to support leaders in improving their command climate through data-driven changes that help eliminate harmful behaviors in the military, protect our people, and support readiness. Locations for the 2023 OSIEs were selected using a multi-pronged risk index, including data from the Defense Organizational Climate Survey and other data involving risk for harmful behaviors. OSIEs expand the Department's efforts on integrated prevention of harmful behaviors and heighten the visibility of risk and protective factors impacting our installations and improve our chances of detecting and correcting harmful behaviors before tragic incidents occur.

Although we are making progress with the IRC recommendations, we know there is still much work to be done. We believe our efforts will restore the trust and faith of people, assist victims with recovery, and hold offenders appropriately accountable. We owe nothing less to our servicemembers. We thank Congress for authorizing and appropriating the full amount of the Department's fiscal year 2023 request in support of the IRC recommendations. Your support of the fiscal year 2024 DOD budget request would ensure we have the continued resources to aggressively combat this issue, and complete the historic changes to reform military justice, field the specialized prevention workforce, train and equip response personnel, and empower survivors. These efforts not only reflect our values, but they have a direct impact on ensuring the unit cohesion necessary for success on the battlefield.

#### *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility*

Our diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) efforts recognize that even one instance of inappropriate discrimination or other problematic behaviors can destroy unit cohesion and trust, which are necessary for the good order and discipline that underpins our Armed Forces and our ability to deter and defeat adversaries. Additionally, our approach to DEIA recognizes that we must do more to draw upon the varied backgrounds, skills, talents, and unique strengths from all members of our Total Force. Taking these actions helps support all of our people, and ensures we maintain our readiness and unique strategic advantages as a diverse nation.

Enhancing DEIA across our Department also maximizes our ability to recruit and retain top talent, and DOD strives to ensure that the wide-ranging benefits of DEIA also helps drive every aspect of our approach to talent management. Inculcating DEIA principles ensures we are leveraging the strengths of all our people, advancing opportunity, addressing potential barriers and discrepancies, and fundamentally ensuring people are treated with dignity and respect—all of which directly enhance our ability to accomplish the Department's mission to provide the military forces needed to deter war and ensure the Nation's security.

DOD continues to take steps to improve and increase DEIA, and the Department is working to further understand root causes in areas where we lack diversity, develop initiatives that have measurable outcome metrics, maintain appropriate data to inform and target efforts, ensure environments are inclusive of all who serve, and foster a strong governance structure to oversee these efforts.

This past year, the Department published its 2022–2023 DEIA Strategic Plan. To advance progress on DEIA issues, we continue to aggressively address a broad range of topics, including the need for additional efforts to more fully capitalize on the significant benefits that DEIA brings to the Department's mission. With partners across the Department, we continue to address efforts to increase diversity within talent pathways; expand DEIA data collection, analysis, and management; and integrate diversity and inclusion curriculum into leadership development training.

The DOD is focused on creating long-term changes by supporting racial, ethnic, and gender diversity and inclusion in the military—as well as diversity and inclusion for varied backgrounds, strengths, skills, and talents—and eliminating any

causal factors that prevent diversity or lead to discriminatory practices. We are taking steps to ensure our servicemembers and DOD civilian employees have opportunities to achieve their professional goals based on merit, remove any barriers that prevent equal opportunity, and ensure a cohesive and ready force that reflects the diversity of our Nation. Doing so will help the Department attract and retain the best talent for our wide-ranging needs, while supporting strong and resilient teams.

*Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) Program*

Proper oversight of the operation, administration, and effectiveness of the overall JROTC program is paramount as a program to highlight the importance and merits of public service, and bridge the ever widening civil-military divide in our country. Following allegations of JROTC instructor misconduct, P&R has taken action to address concerns. P&R issued a memorandum to the Military Departments on March 10, detailing the continued collaboration in developing and codifying policy to ensure we have effective oversight and administration of the JROTC program. P&R is working on an expedited Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) that will direct the Military Departments to implement seven policy directives: 1) Standardize background investigations—Tier 1 with Child Care Investigation for Non-Sensitive Positions; 2) Achieve a maximum headquarter to school oversight ratio of 1:30; 3) Standardize Memorandums of Agreement; 4) Implement JROTC Instructor Prohibited Activities Acknowledgement; 5) Implement Student and Instructor Responsibilities Acknowledgement; 6) Title IX Compliance Course for all JROTC instructors; and 7) Notification of Allegations Against a JROTC Instructor.

The fiscal year 2024 Defense budget requests \$12.98 million to support increased oversight and evaluation of the operation, administration, and effectiveness of the overall JROTC program. Congress' support for these funds would allow the Department to achieve a 1:30 oversight ratio, directly support annual, in-person program evaluations, and expand the capacity for processing Tier 1 with Child Care Investigation for Non-Sensitive Positions which would contribute to the safety of all program participants.

PROMOTE THE HEALTH, WELL-BEING, AND SAFETY OF THE FORCE AND FAMILIES

Our people are the foundation of our military readiness and national security and it is not just the servicemembers who serve, but their entire family. Current events—recovery from a global pandemic, economic pressures such as inflation, declining trust in institutions, and two decades of accelerated operational tempo—make it more important than ever to focus the Department's policies and resources on taking care of our people.

*Safety and Occupational Health*

To preserve our enduring advantages, we must ensure the safety and health of our greatest asset, the Department's military and civilian personnel, and protect our resources and capabilities. We are elevating safety governance through the Department's senior safety governance forum, the Defense Safety Oversight Council (DSOC), as well as the congressionally mandated, operationally focused Joint Safety Council. We are undergoing a Department-wide effort to establish, implement, validate, and analyze consistent safety data collection standards and processes, based on the 2020 National Commission on Military Aviation Safety recommendations. Standardized safety data will be integrated and analyzed with readiness, training, maintenance, medical, and other information to identify risk mitigations and support resource decisions. Our governance guides DOD-wide cross-cutting efforts to achieve and promote a safety culture, reduce mishaps, manage safety hazards, and ensure actionable enterprise safety data is accessible to support DOD's business processes for managing safety and minimizing risk in the workplace.

*Economic Security*

Ensuring that we are appropriately compensating our workforce and increasing the overall economic security of servicemembers and military families is integral to the competition for talent that supports mission readiness. While we believe the current military compensation package is fair, in order to remain competitive, we must keep pace with private-sector wage growth and inflation to ensure we can recruit and retain the force we need. Due to Congress' support, on January 1, 2023, servicemembers and civilian employees received a 4.6 percent basic pay raise, the largest since 2003. This was coupled with an average 12.1 percent increase in the basic allowance for housing and an 11.2 percent increase in the basic allowance for subsistence. The President's Fiscal Year 2024 Budget request provides a 5.2 percent pay raise for military and civilian personnel in Calendar Year 2024 assuring fair and equitable compensation needed for recruitment and retention of skilled talent.

These have been impactful increases, we recognize there is still work to be done and will continue to implement change as we evaluate the effectiveness of these increases.

Food insecurity is also a complex issue that requires collaboration across the Department, as well as with other Federal agencies, community partners, and military service organizations. Through a coordinated effort, the DOD is working to ensure military families have the resources, support, and knowledge necessary to address and avoid food insecurity, especially when they are most vulnerable. In addition to executing the Department's Strengthening Food Security in the Force: Strategy and Roadmap, the DOD also implemented a Basic Needs Allowance in January 2023 to ensure servicemembers' household income is at least 130 percent of the Federal poverty guideline. The fiscal year 2023 NDAA increases this level from 130 percent to 150 percent by January 2024.

These increases in pay and allowances will have a real, positive impact on the economic well-being of the Force and our families. The 14th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (QRMC) has begun its work, and we look forward to reviewing its progress. As directed by President Biden, the QRMC will thoroughly look at the military compensation system and how it can ensure economic security and better attract and retain servicemembers and their families, including through a first-ever review of childcare access and cost, and consideration of additional factors such as the challenge of military spouse unemployment, frequent military moves, periods of geographic separation between servicemembers and their spouses (including dual military couples).

#### *Taking Care of Our People*

To advance Taking Care of People as one of his three priorities, Secretary Austin issued a memorandum on November 17, 2021, "Strengthening Economic Security in the Force," which directed 12 specific initiatives in three categories: Provide Immediate Relief; Increase Stability for servicemembers and families; and Expand Financial Readiness Resources. Less than 1 year later, on September 22, 2022, the Secretary issued a second memorandum: "Taking Care of Our Servicemembers and Families." It directed 13 specific initiatives in four categories: Securing Affordable Basic Needs; Making Moves Easier; Further Strengthening our Support to Families; and Expanding Spousal Employment. These initiatives took measurable action to tackle pressing problems facing servicemembers and their families such as economic pain occasioned by this inflationary period, a persistent unemployment rate of 21 percent for military spouses, difficulty finding child care, and mitigating the hardships military families face due to frequent moves. Moving forward, the Department will leverage previous actions and continue to aggressively pursue programs and initiatives to make sure we are taking care of our people.

#### *Military Spouse Employment*

No spouse should be forced to choose between supporting their servicemember and pursuing their own meaningful career. On January 5, 2023, the President signed into law Congress' amendment to the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to require portability of most professional licenses for servicemembers and their spouses. This law is intended to ease the ability of military spouses to find meaningful employment as they advance their careers while relocating alongside their servicemember. The Defense State Liaison Office will continue its work with State legislators in all 50 states to improve and enhance State laws governing occupational license portability and reciprocity to reduce barriers to portable, sustainable careers.

The Department also continues to increase employment opportunities through the broadening of the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), with a focus on critical employment sectors such as information technology, education, and small businesses. This past October, the MSEP welcomed 70 new employer partners, bringing the total number of MSEP partners to more than 600. Since its inception in 2011, the MSEP employer partners have hired more than 250,000 spouses.

The Department has also launched a 12-week paid fellowship program to expand employment opportunities for eligible military spouses and connect employers with a diverse, highly skilled, and educated workforce. The Military Spouse Career Accelerator Pilot (MSCAP) program provides spouses of currently serving members of the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Space Force, to include Active, Reserve and National Guard components, with paid fellowships at civilian employers across various industries and locations. This is being done in partnership with best-in-class non-profit programming that has a proven record of military spouse employment and empowerment.

Understanding that military spouses are usually transitory based on their servicemember's duty location, we are addressing the ongoing challenge of ensuring

they are aware of available resources and support to assist them. Ensuring awareness and increasing utilization of resources across the force, and across the spectrum of service, is crucial to retaining our servicemembers and their families.

#### *Military Parental Leave Program*

At the beginning of this year, the Department published its expanded parental leave policy that builds on the Department's support of military families by streamlining and enhancing leave for servicemembers who become parents of a new child. The fiscal year 2022 NDAA expanded parental leave to 12 weeks for eligible birth and non-birth parents. This includes adoptive parents and foster parents in cases of long-term foster placements. For birth mothers, the 12 weeks of parental leave is in addition to and following authorized medical convalescent leave necessary to recover from childbirth. The expanded parental leave policy is competitive with the parental leave offered by Federal agencies and other leading employers. By strengthening military families, we strengthen our force and our Nation.

#### *Child Care*

Child care is a workforce enabler and a critical component of the readiness, efficiency, and retention of the Total Force. Affordable, quality child care continues to be a challenge facing many DOD families and the Nation in general. Child care is among the lowest paid occupations in the Nation, and child care professionals with a similar education earn less than those working in different fields, which contributes to the persistent challenge of recruiting and retaining the workforce needed to meet the child care needs of our families.

To best support the child care needs of our servicemembers and civilian workforce, the Department will continue to work in collaboration with the Military Services on the development and implementation of initiatives aimed at improving child care availability, addressing child care staffing challenges, and expanding access to community-based fee assistance programs.

In October 2022, the Department increased the fee assistance provider rate cap from \$1,500 to \$1,700 per child, per month, providing more fee assistance to families. The DOD will also continue its pilot program of providing servicemembers financial assistance to offset the cost of in-home child care, and expand The Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood PLUS program which utilizes the States Quality Rating and Improvement Systems as an indicator of provider quality, in lieu of national accreditation, broadening the pool of providers eligible to receive fee assistance on behalf of military families. The Department is in the process of establishing a pilot program to contract non-profit child development centers in areas of high cost, low availability, and high need through non-profit organizations.

We have expanded Military OneSource offerings for no-cost access to a web-based subscription service of providers offering child care services. The DOD has also established a DOD Child Care Compensation Task Force that is currently conducting a bottom-up review of child care compensation, recruitment, and retention.

Addressing child care access is another critical element to building an enduring advantage, and the right thing to do to take care of our people.

#### *Commissaries*

Access to grocery products worldwide remains a top-priority of the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA). Understanding that Defense Commissaries are DOD's first line of defense for families in need, we were able to achieve an average of 23 percent savings at our Commissaries by the end of fiscal year 2022, even with historic inflation. More recently, in the last quarter, those savings increased to 25.3 percent, exceeding the goal set out by Secretary Austin. Additionally, online shopping is available at all commissaries. DeCA's primary purpose is to provide a benefit that enhances quality of life and readiness for military servicemembers, their families, retirees, Medal of Honor recipients, their authorized family members, all veterans with a service-connected disability, and individuals approved and designated as the primary family caregivers of eligible veterans.

#### *Reproductive Health Care*

In the wake of the Dobbs Supreme Court decision last spring, it is estimated that 40 percent of Active Duty servicewomen have no or severely restricted access to abortion services where they are stationed. Additionally, 39 percent of the U.S. population has no or limited nearby access to Assisted Reproductive Technology services such as invitro fertilization or IVF. The Department has heard directly from our servicemembers who have expressed their concerns about access to reproductive health care for themselves and their family members, and the impacts on readiness, retention and recruitment were verified by independent experts.

In October 2022, Secretary Austin issued his “Ensuring Access to Reproductive Health” memorandum to ensure that servicemembers and their dependents can access the non-covered reproductive health care they need, regardless of where they are stationed. On February 16, the Department published three important new policies to help servicemembers access essential reproductive health care, and on February 27, the Military Departments published guidance to implement the policies.

The first policy establishes a standard timeline for command notification of pregnancy. Under this new policy, servicemembers are allowed up to 20 weeks of gestation to notify their commanders of pregnancy with a few exceptions. This policy is intended to allow the servicemember time to make private, personal health care and family decisions while accounting for commanders’ responsibilities to meet operational requirements and protect the well-being of servicemembers in their command. The policy includes limited exceptions for requiring notification before 20 weeks such as specific military duties, occupational health hazards, and medical conditions. Servicemembers are also encouraged to access prenatal care as soon as they learn of their pregnancy to promote the health and well-being of themselves and their pregnancy. When a servicemember chooses to delay command notification, a DOD health care provider will place the pregnant servicemember in a medical temporary non-deployable status and limited-duty or light-duty status without reference to the servicemember’s pregnancy status.

The second policy allows for administrative absence for non-covered reproductive health care. Military medical providers may perform—and TRICARE pays for—abortions in limited circumstances: when the life of the mother would be endangered if the fetus is carried to term, or when the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. Other abortions are not covered and are paid for by the individual. Also, except in very limited circumstances, TRICARE does not pay for Assisted Reproductive Technology. In limited circumstances, severely ill or injured servicemembers may receive Assisted Reproductive Technology through the Supplemental Health Care Program, however, most beneficiaries seeking such services do so at their own expense.

The new policy grants servicemembers an administrative absence, with approval, from their normal duty station to access non-covered reproductive health care, including non-covered abortion and Assisted Reproductive Technology, without loss of pay or being charged leave. Servicemembers may also be granted an administrative absence to accompany a dual-military spouse or dependent to access non-covered reproductive health care.

The third policy authorizes travel allowances for non-covered reproductive health care when timely access to such care is not available within the local area of the duty station. These are standard allowances under the Department of Defense Joint Travel Regulation. Travel allowances—which include transportation, lodging, and meals—will be available for servicemembers or an eligible dependent, and for an attendant or escort if the individual is not capable of traveling alone. As before, the non-covered reproductive health care procedure itself is at the expense of the patient.

In addition to these policies, the Department standardized walk-in contraception services at military medical treatment facilities to promote easy, timely access to care, and support the family planning goals of servicemembers and their families. One hundred and thirty facilities now offer same-day access to comprehensive contraceptive counseling, including the full scope of non-surgical contraceptive methods, without a need for a referral or appointment.

Nothing is more important than taking care of our people, and these policies are necessary to ensure the health and well-being of our force and families, and create a diverse and inclusive force. Beyond being the right thing to do, the policies promote recruitment and retention of servicemembers when our personnel and their families may have serious concerns about whether they will effectively lose access to reproductive health services if they are required to move to a jurisdiction where this essential health care is not available.

#### *Deterrence of Drug Use*

The use of illicit drugs and misuse of prescription drugs are inconsistent with DOD policy and the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and have a substantial negative impact on performance in the inherently hazardous conditions of combat, and degrade safety and security for all personnel within the Department. To deter the use of illicit drugs, the Department is implementing an outreach strategy to inform servicemembers and their families on the facts and risks related to drug use including the impact on career and overall well-being, and promote and destigmatize substance use disorder. This initiative will utilize multiple communication touchpoints, including digital media, to amplify messaging and augment current service-level prevention, education, and outreach initiatives. This effort will establish commu-

nication platforms that can widely disseminate information about drugs to include new and emerging drug threats, with the goal of reaching servicemembers across multiple social and digital media platforms.

#### *Suicide Prevention*

Every death by suicide is a tragedy and weighs heavily on the military community. The Department is steadfast in its commitment to suicide prevention, and the overall well-being of our servicemembers, their families, caregivers, and survivors. Suicide results from a complex interaction of psychological, biological, and environmental factors that vary among individuals. Because no two individuals are identical, our suicide-prevention efforts seek to enhance protective factors and address a range of risk factors.

We have a responsibility to care for our people and are committed to addressing this issue not only because of its impacts to those who serve our Nation, but also because it affects our missions. Our public health approach focuses on reducing suicide risk for all servicemembers and their families by targeting the various underlying risk factors (such as relationship, financial, and behavioral health stressors), recognizing the heightened risk for suicide among servicemembers who experience sexual assault and sexual harassment, while also enhancing protective factors (such as social connections, coping skills, and safety in one's environment).

We are working to enhance holistic, data-driven suicide prevention; non-clinical policy and programming, oversight, and engagement that address prevention across populations; and also clinical suicide prevention efforts with behavioral health services. The Department's approach to suicide prevention is focused on four key areas: fostering quality of life for servicemembers and their families; addressing stigma as a barrier to seeking help; improving clinical services; and promoting a culture of lethal-means safety.

Pursuant to the FY2022 NDAA, Secretary Austin directed the creation of the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee (SPRIRC) on March 22, 2022, and he further directed the committee to develop recommendations that could be implemented enterprise-wide. The SPRIRC conducted a comprehensive review of suicide prevention and response programs, visiting 11 installations both in and out of the continental U.S. and meeting with over 2,000 servicemembers and 600 civilians. In late February, it released its report to the public.

The report revealed four key themes to effectively reduce military suicide. First, restructuring suicide prevention training is required to standardize content and better resonate with servicemembers, in line with principles of Integrated Primary Prevention. Second, additional resources are needed to help servicemembers navigate and effectively access existing behavioral health and other support services. Third, we must ensure that servicemembers are safely storing personally owned firearms through focused training and accessible storage options. Last, we must emphasize leader stewardship through taking care of people and addressing servicemember needs before problems become crises.

The SPRIRC report contains 127 recommendations with the vast majority aligning with the four pillars of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, and a small number reflecting the unique needs of military environments. The Department is diligently reviewing and preparing to implement applicable recommendations of the SPRIRC to enhance suicide prevention response efforts of the Department; to include efforts that can be taken swiftly and those that will require more persistent efforts to implement.

The Department has the responsibility to support and protect those who defend the United States and their families, and we must do everything possible to prevent suicide in our military community. Toward this goal, we seek to encourage help-seeking behaviors, eliminate stigma, and enable access to behavioral health clinical services for our servicemembers and their families.

#### *Military Health System*

The fiscal year 2017 NDAA enacted sweeping reforms to the organization and management of military medicine. The expanded responsibilities of the Defense Health Agency (DHA) are now largely complete. The DHA exercises authority, direction, and control over all Military Treatment Facilities (MTF) worldwide. The fiscal year 2017 NDAA also directed DOD to restructure or realign MTFs to support the Department's readiness requirements. However, the fiscal year 2023 NDAA placed a 1-year moratorium on any changes to the configuration of our MTFs. As requested, we are preparing an update to Congress on our way forward in the coming month.

The fiscal year 2023 NDAA also included a 5-year moratorium on further military medical personnel reductions. Together with the Joint Staff, we are updating our

medical requirements as combatant command operational plans are also updated. We are also conducting a comprehensive, internal review—with our OSD colleagues and the Military Departments—on the best configuration of medical infrastructure and personnel for the long-term. We are resolute in our commitment to ensure combatant commanders have the medical resources necessary to protect, treat and provide long-term medical services to our men and women in uniform.

We are also committing resources and attention to the ongoing challenge of suicide, to include addressing the shortage of mental health providers for both uniformed servicemembers and family members. We recently received the recommendations from the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee, and are continuing to implement strategies that can help reverse the heart-breaking trends we have witnessed—both in DOD and in the Nation.

The Department remains grateful for the long-term support from this Committee for our military medical research program. In those areas of most pressing need and relevance to today's emerging threats that include infectious disease, combat casualty care and other areas of critical importance to our warfighters, Congress' support is critical to our success.

In 2022 and into 2023, the DHA has been able to focus its resources to supporting operational requirements of the Department, while continuing to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. There were a number of important milestones achieved by the DHA in the past year that will continue to influence operations in 2023 and into 2024. One of DHA's achievements was migrating 75 percent of MTFs to the new Electronic Health Record (EHR), known as MHS GENESIS. In a few weeks, we will deploy this system in the National Capital Region. This modern EHR platform will provide the Department with a powerful tool to support our readiness mission, improve interoperability and record sharing with care delivered in the private sector, and allow our patients to engage more directly with their providers in managing their care.

Another major milestone is the use of virtual health. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the Department's use of virtual health, and for the coming year, we will build on what we have learned and how our providers and patients effectively used technology throughout this public health emergency. DHA is creating a new digital health strategy that will expand our use of technology in ways that improve our training, preparedness, access, and quality of care. We intend to work with our military medical leaders and industry partners to focus on what can be achieved now, and build on our successes over time.

In late 2022, after a multi-year process, the DHA awarded the next generation of TRICARE contracts at a value of over \$135 billion over the next 8 years. These contracts will deliver high-value, patient-centric care that integrates military and private sector care. In January, protests were filed that will slightly delay this transition. We are working closely with GAO and will ensure this process is carried out in a fair and timely way.

For the current fiscal year, our mid-year review is underway. As in past years, the Military Health System continues its sustained decade-long track record in responsibly managing health care costs—which remain below the National Health Expenditures per capita rate. Our fiscal year 2024 budget request presents a balanced, comprehensive strategy that aligns with the Secretary's priorities. We look forward to working with you over the coming months to further refine and articulate our requirements.

#### *Transition from the Military*

We must provide the best support possible to our servicemembers who defend our country and keep it secure, especially as they prepare to transition into civilian life. In exchange for their dedicated service to our Nation, servicemembers should return to civilian life at the end of their commitment more competitive in the labor marketplace. This is the social contract that the Department makes with our servicemembers. When the DOD lives up to it, through programs like tuition assistance, credentialing, and Skillbridge, American society reaps the benefits. About 200,000 servicemembers transition out of the military each year. The transition from military to civilian life—especially the 365 days prior to and the 365 days post separation—is widely recognized as a challenging and stressful time for servicemembers and their families. To assist in the transition, the DOD partners with agencies across the Federal Government and with the private sector to ensure our servicemembers thrive once they leave military service.

#### *Tuition Assistance, SkillBridge, and Credentialing*

DOD's Tuition Assistance (TA) program provides servicemembers with financial assistance to enhance their academic achievement (for example, earn a degree or

certificate) during their off-duty time, which in turn improves job performance, promotion potential, self-development, personal quality of life, and overall readiness. While TA is not specifically designed in support of the servicemembers' transition out of the military, it also provides an ancillary benefit as an effective retention tool and supports their potential career after their service.

DOD's Credentialing, Apprenticeships (the United Services Military Apprenticeship Program—USMAP) and SkillBridge Employment Training programs exist on the spectrum of how military training, experience, and skills relate to increased mission readiness and ultimately result in successful post Active Duty careers. The demand for credentialing from servicemembers and industry continues to grow. Professional credentialing is an integral key of the Services' recruiting, in-service development, promotion, retention, and transition strategies. SkillBridge allows servicemembers to deepen, broaden, and tailor the competencies that they developed through their military service to increase their compatibility and competitiveness in the civilian labor market starting up to 6 months before separation.

#### *Transition Assistance Program*

Transition Assistance Program (TAP) delivery is a collaborative effort between DOD, Department of Labor, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the Small Business Administration; each with a primary area of responsibility and focus. However, the program succeeds due to a robust interagency collaboration and communications strategy that encompasses these four agencies, and three additional agencies—Department of Homeland Security, Department of Education, and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. Working together, these seven agencies and the Services provide consistent messaging and ensure collaboration and synchronization in the delivery of the program.

During TAP, all transitioning servicemembers complete a Military Occupational Code (MOC) crosswalk. They compare their military skills to civilian career opportunities and identify any gaps in education and training that they can address to enhance civilian employability and marketability. The MOC crosswalk is set up to help all transitioning servicemembers refine their goals. TAP also addresses transition-related risks and barriers as part of the initial counseling with a personal self-assessment administered by the Services. The self-assessment provides Commanders, TAP Counselors, and servicemembers with insights to and information about potential risks and levels of support required. This information facilitates development of the servicemember's individual transition plan and steps to meet the servicemember's individual transition goals. At the end of TAP, during the CAPSTONE event, Commanders and TAP Counselors review the efficacy of each servicemember's individual transition plan. If the CAPSTONE review indicates a need or desire for follow on support, the servicemember is connected via a warm handover to the appropriate agency or support organization for specialized assistance targeted to the servicemember's specific needs.

#### *DOD-VA Collaboration*

The DOD continues to strengthen collaboration and coordination with our partners at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). With new authorities provided recently by Congress (NDAA Fiscal Year 21 and the PACT Act), both Departments are further leveraging shared resources and interconnected processes, programs, and initiatives to support servicemembers, veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. For fiscal year 2023, VA and DOD renewed our shared commitment to support health care collaboration, benefits and service delivery, and to enhance the transition process and post-separation experience, modernize shared business operations, and strengthen our interoperability.

VA and DOD senior leaders are now more interconnected and aware of how their decisions impact one another. As such, the VA-DOD Joint Executive Committee uses an intentional decisionmaking process that is servicemember-and-veteran centric, results-driven, and forward-looking throughout a servicemember's career and transition to a veteran.

Last year, DOD and VA signed the Joint Data and Analytics Strategy in an effort to optimize data, and to coordinate and share analytics. This is particularly important as we support the VA with the implementation of The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022, or PACT Act. DOD and VA are working to ensure the needed exchange of data to provide health care and benefits to veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances, and to empower both agencies to make better decisions directly impacting servicemembers and veterans health care.

One such example is the creation of a single, common VA-DOD Separation Health Assessment (SHA). Both Departments have worked closely to coalesce terminology,

definitions and develop joint questions. The new common form reduces redundancies, saves time, allows for comparative analysis between Departments on health effect outcomes, and provides servicemembers more flexibility on where they can complete their separation health assessment. VA will begin using the OneSHA in the third quarter of fiscal year 2023, and the DOD will implement the common form in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2023. Both VA and DOD are simultaneously making technological changes to their systems for employment of the new form.

#### CULTIVATE TALENT MANAGEMENT

The Department will maintain its high standards and is committed to helping those who desire to serve meet their goals and ambitions. We will continue to invest in recruiting and retaining the talented men and women who make up our All-Volunteer Force and the civilians who support them. With emerging practices and standards in the current labor market, the Department must reimagine the DOD workforce to recruit, retain, and develop the talent it needs.

#### *Military Recruiting and Retention*

Steady recruit flows are critical to the All-Volunteer Force. Given the tight labor market exacerbated by the residual effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and an increasing lack of familiarity with military service among young people, the Services continue to face a challenging recruiting environment. The Services are balancing declining end-strength with high retention, but the impact of repeatedly missing recruitment goals can create long-term challenges. Reinvigorating the recruiting pipeline requires senior DOD leader engagement, robust solutions to barriers to service, a concerted effort to rebuild public trust and inspire service, innovative approaches to messaging, and a commitment to consistent and substantial resource investments.

Recruiting challenges in fiscal year 2022 foreshadowed the increasing recruiting challenges faced in fiscal year 2023. Near historic lows at the beginning of fiscal year 2023 in the Services' Delayed Entry Programs contributed to the ongoing challenges. Market conditions continue to impact our recruiting efforts as we are in a fierce competition with the private sector for skilled and innovative talent. The propensity to serve in the military continues to be an issue with our youth as many do not believe military service is compatible with aspirational education and career goals. Nearly 50 percent of youth never considered joining the military, and 58 percent believe individuals leaving the military will have difficulty readjusting to everyday life.

It is likely that recruiting challenges will continue to persist for the foreseeable future, and there is no one silver bullet or specific action that the Department or the Services can quickly take to resolve the current recruiting challenges. However, we are looking for ways to get to the heart of our citizens and youth, and galvanize our future servicemembers on the merit and value of contributing to the country's well-being through military service.

To this end, the Department is designing and implementing a comprehensive, broad outreach strategy that tells the DOD story and presents the vast opportunities military service brings. This multi-pronged effort includes campaigning through an interagency partnership with Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, and Selective Service that touts the personal benefits and the positive outcomes public service has on our country and our communities. In addition to cultivating a culture of service, a standing interagency collaboration offers a framework for prioritizing and coordinating service across Presidential administrations.

A large-scale, sustained National Military Advertising campaign is also needed to dispel inaccuracies and educate both youth and their influencers about the opportunities in the military. To support this initiative, the Department is requesting \$40 million in the fiscal year 2024 Defense Budget for a joint marketing campaign that focuses on youth and influencers. This campaign is critical to addressing misperceptions and garnering increased support of influencers who may help or support a young person's decision to join the military.

The outreach strategy also includes celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the All-Volunteer Force, the 75th Anniversary of President Truman's order to racially desegregate the Force and congressional action to allow women to serve, and a robust strategic messaging campaign through senior leader engagements and community outreach initiatives that focus on reconnecting the military with America. P&R and the Military Services also continue to partner with the Department of Education on efforts to expand access of military recruiters to high school students through engagements with Chief State School officers, continued advancement of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), promotion of the Purple Star Program, and the expansion of the ASVAB Career Exploration program. Each of these

efforts expand awareness of our military and the many benefits and opportunities that come with military service.

We would appreciate your support for the Department’s fiscal year 2024 budget request, which will help address some of the recruiting issues. The Department is committed to overcoming recruiting challenges through strong collaboration and innovative ideas. We will leverage every competitive advantage we have in an already crowded labor market. Ensuring we have the right number of people—with the right skills and talent—has the highest attention of the Department’s senior leadership. We are committed to not only meeting our military recruiting targets, but also finding the most qualified and mission-ready talent our Nation has to offer.

#### *DOD Civilian Workforce*

The DOD civilian workforce possesses capabilities, expertise, and skills that directly impact DOD’s worldwide military operational capabilities. As critical enablers of our warfighters, DOD civilians perform functions in intelligence, research and development, equipment maintenance, health care, family support, base operating services, and other activities that directly support the military forces and readiness. The Department continuously strives to improve its ability to recruit, retain, develop, and reward the civilian workforce to support the warfighter and encourage innovative best practices throughout the armed forces.

Competition for talent in innovation and cutting-edge fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), cyber, and health care that are in high demand across the public and private sectors continues to be one of the biggest challenges for hiring civilian talent. Largely due to Congress’ support, the Department continues to utilize a variety of human capital solutions to better compete in the current labor market, including expanded use of direct hire authorities, incentives, and special pay where authorized. These hiring tools are critical to compete against the private sector by reducing our time-to-hire and allowing us to target the talent needed in key areas.

Following last summer’s public release of the Defense Business Board’s report on Civilian Talent Management, the Department took immediate action launching the Talent Management Executive Council that includes all Functional Community Managers and elevated its talent management framework to the highest levels of DOD, aligning talent management under the USD P&R with the Deputy Secretary of Defense exercising decision authority and oversight. We are also increasing outreach and marketing efforts to highlight opportunities through our DOD civilian careers web site, social media content, and live in-person and virtual events. The Department is also expanding our development and use of work roles to better identify what skills we need versus what skills we have. These insights will be critical to upskilling and reskilling our current workforce and to best address shortfalls in critical and high-demand skills.

Over the past several months, the Department has been researching and collecting talent management best practices and developing a Talent Management Best Practices Playbook. The playbook shares insights on talent management approaches from some of America’s most successful companies, as well as successful practices from other Federal agencies. We have also established a working group to look at designing a hiring model that will reduce the time of “contact to contract.” The Department is in a fierce competition for talent and a critical component of this competition is the ability to hire talented people in a timely manner.

Additionally, we are in the process of hiring our inaugural Chief Talent Management Officer who will lead the development of DOD’s talent management strategy. The CTMO will report directly to the USD P&R and will orchestrate the numerous talent management efforts across the DOD to include areas such as recruitment and outreach, and learning and development opportunities. These actions, and the many other strategic workforce planning and human capital management activities, support the Department’s need to shape a professional, agile, and ready civilian workforce.

#### ADVANCE STRATEGIC READINESS

Building and maintaining our strategic advantage, as underscored by the National Defense Strategy, requires that we remain prepared to confront near term challenges while taking steps necessary to be ready in the future. Advancing strategic readiness means ensuring our ability to build, maintain, and balance warfighting capabilities and competitive advantages to achieve strategic objectives across threat and time horizons.

### *Strategic Readiness Framework*

The Deputy Secretary of Defense directed P&R to lead the establishment of the strategic readiness framework emphasized in the 2022 National Defense Strategy. Since then, P&R has convened the resources and stakeholder support necessary to integrate the concept of strategic readiness throughout the Department to inform a broader understanding of the impacts of decisions on readiness. We are developing an analytic framework that integrates models across the Department to provide greater visibility on the readiness tradeoffs incurred by today's decisions and assessments that capture the quantifiable, cumulative, and cascading impacts of strategic readiness in DOD programs, policies, and strategies. This holistic view of readiness is designed to drive decision advantage by integrating processes to provide leaders with comprehensive, objective assessments of the strategic readiness-related risks and tradeoffs associated with our decisions.

A notable example of the strategic readiness framework is the P&R-led process to assess the potential strategic readiness impacts of providing security assistance to Ukraine. We assess these potential impacts against our other known requirements—such as training—and account for defense industrial base information, so that we have a clear picture of our own supply timeline. This assessment process then identifies what actions the Department can take to mitigate readiness impacts. The support Congress has provided to the Department through supplemental appropriations is critical in allowing us to add resilience to our industrial base and replenish our own stocks. In some scenarios, we have even been able to accelerate modernization plans as a by-product of our support to Ukraine and the data-driven mitigation process we have in place. We are already taking the lessons learned through the Ukraine security assistance process to inform and refine the strategic readiness framework and how we assess, quantify, and mitigate potential strategic readiness impacts across our processes.

### *Professional Military Education (PME)*

The Department is updating PME to make it more effective and relevant to the National Defense Strategy (NDS). Our War Colleges and Command and Staff Colleges have adjusted the framing of appropriate aspects of their core curricula to address the challenges of strategic competition with China and Russia. The fiscal year 2024 budget request supports the strengthening of the national security workforce, consistent with the President's National Security Memorandum (NSM-3), Revitalizing America's Foreign Policy and National Security Workforce, Institutions, and Partnerships. The PME enterprise, and Joint PME in particular, have set a high bar for developing the knowledge and habits of mind for the U.S. profession of arms.

The NDS states that PME will “foster critical thinking and analytical skills, fluency in critical languages, and integration of insights from the social and behavioral science.” P&R is overseeing the implementation of these efforts through policy, governance, and talent management levers. DODI 1322.35, Volume 1, “Military Education: Program Management and Administration,” directs the military education institutions to design, develop, and deliver outcomes-based military education (OBME) programs. Program outcomes form a critical bridge between PME and operational performance. The Department is implementing this first-ever DOD policy on PME, synchronizing educational and operational requirements, and assessing outcomes in order to improve talent management and strengthen educational impact.

We are also adapting manpower and personnel systems to collect and utilize performance information to improve talent management. This data-informed talent management approach is most evident in our efforts to improve management of critical language skills to address longstanding issues with the recruitment, training, utilization, and retention of cryptologic language analysts and to meet National Security Agency and Service requirements for professional level proficiency. Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture (LREC) skills are critical to the DOD mission and must be managed to optimize their accession, development, sustainment, enhancement, and employment. LREC skills improve the effectiveness of the total force by enhancing linkages with allies and partners, as well as providing direct and often immediate insight into potential adversary capability, intention, and activity, which is essential for the challenges of near-peer, strategic competition.

We also oversee discrete programs such as the Secretary of Defense Strategic Thinkers Program, a highly competitive 10-month master's degree program, enrolling a select cohort of Active Duty military officers from across the Services in a specialized track within John Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). The Department has also increased the number of international officers participating in the U.S. PME system. Relationships built in the classroom undergird the hard power of coalition interoperability with Allies and partners on the battlefield.

Developing servicemembers who understand the evolving nature of the security environment and how it potentially affects American interests, warfare, and the dimensions of strategic competition requires a PME system that keeps pace. Strategic readiness involves not only having the necessary equipment and technology, but also servicemembers who have the training and education to compete in a new era of competition.

*Preparing for the Pacing Challenge*

Training is critical to preparing the Joint Force to meet the pacing challenge. Rapid technological advancement and threat evolution continue to outpace training modernization, widening the gap between how the Joint Force trains and how it will conduct multi-domain operations in a contested environment. To win the joint, multi-domain battles of today and the future, combat forces must have joint interoperable training environments robust enough to support large numbers of joint and coalition warfighters simultaneously, and advanced enough to simulate high-end combat in the all-domain battlespace.

To answer this foundational challenge, we have chartered a new governance body with the Joint Staff, Military Services and Combatant Commands to accelerate the pace of change in the training community and quickly develop and execute realistic, joint, interoperable, and multi-domain training capabilities to meet the threats from peer adversaries in a contested environment. We are driving pacing threat training into the synthetic world, while also increasing the capabilities of large-scale training areas, to replicate the complex, joint, multi-domain fight. Given the key role of Allies and partners in the NDS, we are also breaking down barriers in our training programs, exercises, and security policies to enable greater ally and partner participation.

CONCLUSION

As we look to the future, it is imperative that we do not take for granted what makes our U.S. Military unparalleled and unmatched. It is our people—the Active, Reserve, National Guard, DOD Civilians and all of their families, caregivers, and survivors who are willing to serve this country. They are the bedrock of our national security.

Thank you for your continued support of our servicemembers and their families, we look forward to your questions.

Senator WARREN. Thank you very much. I appreciate it, Secretary Cisneros. I would like to start. I recognize myself for opening questions. All across this country, families need high quality, affordable childcare in order to show up at their jobs or go to school. Military families are no exception on this.

In fact, because of nonstandard work hours, sudden changes, significant deployments, the need for childcare among our military families can be even greater. That is why our military has long recognized that childcare is essential to supporting servicemembers' ability to protect our country.

DOD runs the largest employer sponsored childcare program in the United States. Military and nonmilitary families should all have access to high quality, reliable care, which is why I based my bill for a universal childcare system on the DOD model. But the DOD childcare system still faces its own challenges, a top one being finding enough workers to care for eligible children.

Secretary Cisneros, workforce shortages have been a major problem in the childcare industry for years now, and of course, it has been made even worse since the pandemic. Are military child development centers facing this issue as well?

Mr. CISNEROS. Well, thank you for that question, Senator, and really thank you for your support on the childcare efforts, not only in the military but throughout the Nation. You are correct in stating that there is a national childcare provider shortage in the country and we are feeling that as well.

Since the pandemic we have had trouble, difficulties trying to hire more childcare workers to work in our child development centers. Last year we were able to raise the salary, the minimum wage for workers—

Senator WARREN. We are going to talk about the money in just a minute, but you do have a problem. Let's start there, and I just want to make sure I get this on the record, what it means for military families when they don't have access to the childcare that they need. Can you just say a word about that?

Mr. CISNEROS. Well, ma'am, it does create difficulties. We, as you stated, see childcare as part of our readiness. We want our servicemembers to be able not to really have to kind of think or worry.

To be able to have the ability to drop their child off at—for childcare at a child development center or using one of the other options that we have available to them. It really kind of relieves some stress from them and it allows them to focus on their mission and performing their task.

Senator WARREN. So, it is a part of performing your mission and being able to concentrate on your tasks. Now, it takes a lot to recruit and retain staff for anything. But one significant issue is pay, which is where you started a minute ago. When was the last time you updated your pay scale for childcare workers?

Mr. CISNEROS. Well, last year, ma'am, we were able to raise—

Senator WARREN. I am not asking you that. I am saying when did you last update the pay scale for childcare workers?

Mr. CISNEROS. Well, raising the salaries of our child development workers last year when we raised the minimum wage was when we were able to do that, ma'am.

Senator WARREN. You got the minimum up, but I am talking about the scale overall. Not everybody is down at minimum. I understand that the last time was 30 years ago. Does that sound about right?

Mr. CISNEROS. It has probably been a while since we looked at it, ma'am.

Senator WARREN. What is the highest level of pay a childcare worker in the military system can receive under your 30-year-old scale?

Mr. CISNEROS. From what I have been told, ma'am, it is—allow Mr. Constable to answer this question.

Senator WARREN. Mr. Constable, do you want to answer that one? I think that was known as a lateral pass.

Mr. CONSTABLE. Chairwoman, thank you very much. The top of the skills is approximately \$55,000 a year.

Senator WARREN. Yes, \$55,000. That is, it. That is the top. So, DOD runs a school system for military families called DODEA [Department of Defense Education Activity], right? How does the pay scale for DODEA teacher compare with DOD childcare pay scales for people with similar credentials? Secretary Cisneros. Unless you want to call on Mr. Constable.

Mr. CISNEROS. Well, ma'am, they don't really have similar credentials.

Senator WARREN. Well, that is—the question I am asking is when you have got people with similar credentials—maybe I should ask it this way, what is the top pay for DODEA workers?

Mr. CISNEROS. I will allow Mr. Constable to answer that.

Senator WARREN. Mr. Constable?

Mr. CONSTABLE. The top pays approximately \$110,000 per year.

Senator WARREN. So approximately \$110,000. I think we understand the difference here, \$55,000, \$110,000 for the very top.

So, if we had two workers with the same credentials, same education, same experience, and one was teaching 4-year-olds at a DOD child development center, they would earn only about half as much as one teaching 6-year-olds at a DODEA center.

So, I just have to ask, do you think that makes any sense? Are you surprised to find out that you are having trouble filling these spots?

Mr. CISNEROS. Ma'am we know that, as you stated, right, we are having difficulty hiring these spots. It is a national problem. I think being able to pay a competitive salary is part of that. That has to be there to get in the solution to resolving this problem.

Senator WARREN. So that is why we are here today, to talk about this. Look, childcare is infrastructure. We need roads. We need bridges to get to work. In the case of our military, sometimes you need an aircraft carrier or a cargo jet, but you also need a functioning childcare center.

If the Federal Government is serious about military readiness and national security, if it is serious about retaining families, then we need to invest more in childcare workers, and that means within DOD. It is put money into these workers.

We need to start by updating these pay scales and doing it now. Thirty years is too long to go between, and it is a statement that we don't care about those people. If we care about this system, we will update those pay scales.

Thank you, and I now call on Senator Scott.

Senator SCOTT. Thank you, Chairwoman. All right, Secretary Cisneros, you know that we talked about recruiting is not hitting the numbers. Tell me what you think of your marketing plan and your advertising program, and is it very effective? What should you do differently? Is it properly funded?

Mr. CISNEROS. Thank you for that question, Senator. I will admit we need to do a better job of telling our story, the benefits of military service, what it could provide. Just last month I went out to go talk to a group of college students as well as a group of high school students about the benefits of service and really how it changed my life. Like yourself, sir, I joined the military, 18 years old.

It put me on a different trajectory that I couldn't even imagine—that I never would have imagined for myself that I would be sitting here. So, there are benefits of that, and I think as our Senior Enlisted who were here on the Hill a couple of weeks ago testifying is that we do, we agree that we need to do a better job of telling our story and marketing ourselves.

We are working with our public affairs Department to do that right now. But, as I said in my opening statement, for OSD and

the services have their own budget and they can talk about that in the next panel.

But for OSD, we are requesting \$40 million, that is in the budget, to really help us with a joint marketing campaign that will allow us to go out and do the research with JAMRS [Joint Advertising Market Research Students] that we have, as well as to kind of go out and market to the influencers, whether it be teachers, grandparents, parents, to let them know about the benefits of military service.

Senator SCOTT. So, I am a business, I have spent a lot of money on marketing in my companies, and so, we test everything. We test all of our marketing plans. We tested what worked, what didn't work, and so, talk about how you do that with regard to your advertising and how you market the military.

Mr. CISNEROS. Well, we do have a firm, we do have JAMRS, as we call it, that we work with to go and to prepare, help us prepare the marketing campaign that does the research for it. With that, I can turn over to Mr. Constable and go into more depth about JAMRS and what it does for us.

Mr. CONSTABLE. Thanks very much, sir. Senator, thanks for your question. JAMRS is the Joint Advertising Marketing Research Group that does our work. It is very similar to what you would find in industry and works closely in fact with industry.

As you probably are aware, is a highly fragmented marketplace, so really testing and piloting is key, just as you have said. So, to that end, the additional funds requested in the President's Budget Request for fiscal year 2024 will not be focused on closing deals with servicemembers, the contact to contract as the services can speak about.

What it is really focused on is building the brand, making sure there is more public awareness and making sure that when the time for a decision comes for a young person to join or to not join, they are at least aware that military service or public service even is an option to them.

Then the services can speak about what is in their budget separately for then going in and building on that baseline that we will provide through JAMRS to actually close the sales with each of the contractees.

Senator SCOTT. So, first off, if you could send us a copy of your research, I would like to see it. Second, if it is not successful using the same people, have you changed firms? Are you using the same people that got you where you are you are way behind?

Mr. CONSTABLE. I would have to get you along with the other information, the background on who—with whom we have worked over the different iterations of this effort.

Senator SCOTT. Has anything changed?

Mr. CONSTABLE. Significantly. Again, what you are going to see in the fiscal year 2024-hour request is one of the biggest increases that we have put into this because we have our investment in that baseline awareness, the marketing targeted toward those influencers has waned over the years.

We saw the need to again, not leave it all to the service ads or the service online spots or whatever medium they choose do the whole job. Again, what you are seeing now is based on the data and

understanding that rebuilding the brand and getting awareness to all of our target populations is where we are going.

Senator SCOTT. If you are asking for \$40 million, I mean, do you have research to suggest that if you got there and if you start trying something and it doesn't work, are you going to stop?

Mr. CONSTABLE. I think we will have to, you know, see how the market responds to the investment like everything else. But the intent is to sustain over time that baseline marketing, to keep the brand out there, to keep the awareness of public service, military service out there.

I suspect that as the service numbers ebb and flow over years and years, they will make larger, smaller investments as they need to, to keep their ranks at the right end strengths.

Senator SCOTT. Okay. Thank you.

Senator WARREN. Senator Hirono.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you, Madam Chair. Secretary Cisneros, and probably for Mr. Constable too, my office has heard from our servicemembers in Hawaii that they are deeply concerned about imminent cuts to their cost-of-living allowance by around 50 percent. That is a big potential cut.

Certainly, I share their concerns. Hawaii has the most expensive cost of living of any State in the country. Today, the cost of a gallon of gas in Hawaii is \$4.85, more than \$1.00 above the national average of \$3.46. A gallon of milk in Hawaii is about \$7.25 compared to the national average of \$4.41. The cost of housing in Hawaii is higher than any other State. I could go on.

As we continue to combat inflation, the thought of slashing the cost-of-living allowance for servicemembers in Hawaii is absurd. Secretary Cisneros, does the Department of Defense have information suggesting the cost of living has fallen by 50 percent in Hawaii?

If not, how does DOD justify cutting the cost-of-living allowance for our soldiers, sailors, airmen, guardians, and marines in Hawaii? How do you justify this kind of potential cuts?

Mr. CISNEROS. Ma'am, the cost-of-living allowance that you are referring to is the—well over in Hawaii, they get what we call OCOLA, overseas cost of living allowance. It really is about trying to bring it in line with what the—to make sure that their dollars goes just as far as it does here in the United States, in the Continental United States, I should say.

Senator HIRONO. I am glad you know the Continental U.S. because Hawaii is a State. Go on.

Mr. CISNEROS. Yes. But the, what we are seeing here, right, is that the struggles have really kind of, with inflation—and inflation doesn't really play into the COLA analysis and how we come up with that. But in order to kind of make it—well, what happens as it is evening, things here in the Continental United States have grown as well and have gotten more expensive. But I will turn it over to Mr. Constable again to kind of go into detail on how the formula is figured out there.

Mr. CONSTABLE. Thank you, sir. Thank you, Senator.

Senator HIRONO. Well, first of all, let me just get to, because I am running out of time. So, you believe this kind of a huge cut for

servicemembers in Hawaii is justified? If so, could you send me the justification or send this Committee the justification?

Mr. CISNEROS. We could provide you with the information, ma'am.

Senator HIRONO. Do you consider this kind of cut to be justified?

Mr. CISNEROS. I think, the way the COLA is figured out, and the system that it is, and the way it is, and it is not just I will say, ma'am, it is not just Hawaii, but it is all around the—

Senator HIRONO. Alaska? Well, wherever you are making these kinds of—

Mr. CISNEROS. Germany, Japan, all these areas are facing the same cut because, again, the COLA is meant to bring the pay scale or pay in alignment with what it would be here to make sure that the dollar, if they were here in the States, that the dollar would stretch just as far as they are overseas.

But as we struggle here, or people are struggling here in the Continental United States, it has kind of even the playing field out. So, but we can provide you with that information. I will turn it over to Mr. Constable.

Senator HIRONO. Well, clearly, I don't think that these kinds of cuts are justified for servicemembers in Hawaii. They are already having a pretty hard time. I was glad to see the President's Budget included multiple investments in our servicemembers, like \$90 million to expand full day pre-K, \$209 million for suicide prevention efforts, and \$637 million for continued investment in sexual assault prevention and response.

Although we have made some changes over time in how the military would deal with sexual assault cases, it is still an issue. It still continues to be a scourge. So, I am glad that this kind of investment is being made to continue to fight the scourge. I appreciate the Department of Defense's commitment to taking care of its people, but I think there is more to do, especially for servicemembers considering their family planning options.

Mr. Secretary Cisneros, what is the importance of the Department of Defense's new policies to ensure access to reproductive health care for our servicemembers? Also, cryopreservation is a fertility tool that servicemembers, men and women, could use if they wish to have children of the future.

This is something that the British armed services provides. So, could you give me your views on what the cost of cryopreservation under TRICARE would be? Could this not be an important recruiting and retention tool for the military? All of the services are facing those issues.

Mr. CISNEROS. You know, as you stated, Senator, I believe family planning is very important and we have done a lot, I believe, to kind of help the servicemembers with that. We have walk-in hours for contraceptives for our servicemembers at our Military Treatment Facilities (MTFs).

Now that they can go and make sure that they are on a plan there. We initiated the policies there to help support reproductive health care for our servicemembers as well. Where they are denied access to certain types of health care in certain states, where we will be able to ensure that they will be able to be—travel in order

to get that health care. As far as what you are asking for, I can turn it over to—

Senator HIRONO. Cryopreservation—

Mr. CISNEROS. Cryopreservation—I can turn over to Dr. Martinez. He can go into depth with that.

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Senator, thank you for the question. We do provide the services to servicemembers that may have had trauma or are facing cancer. So, it is very limited and only for servicemembers. We are not providing the care for all the beneficiaries in the TRICARE system. So—and I don't know why.

Senator HIRONO. You are saying that you provide cryopreservation options?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. We may provide that in the case of trauma or in the case of—

Senator HIRONO. Okay. That is a very limited kind of set of circumstances. So, I would ask that you look at what the British armed forces is doing in this area and let us know if this is something that we should contemplate.

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. I will do, ma'am.

Senator HIRONO. Obviously, I support going forward with it. Thank you, Madam Chair

Senator WARREN. Thank you. Senator Budd.

Senator BUDD. Thank you, Madam Chair, so honored to be on the Subcommittee with you. It is good to be with a Member, a former Member of the U.S. House, and we served together for a few years.

A couple of questions. I want to draw your attention, and this is on the heels of the recruiting conversation, I want to draw your attention to an incredible organization called Our Community Salutes. It recognizes and honors high school seniors who plan to enlist in the military following their graduation. They also recognize, the group also recognizes their parents and other members of their family.

Now, this is an incredible way to build and maintain support for our military within communities across America. Despite senior military leaders speaking at these events, I am told that military lawyers have taken issue with official communications to inform recruiters and senior leaders of opportunities to engage or support Our Community Salutes.

Mr. Secretary, will you commit to look into this and find ways to partner with OCS, Our Community Salutes, and other organizations like it. The bottom line is we need all the support we can get to get close to our recruiting gap. So, will you look into this?

Mr. CISNEROS. Yes, Senator. We could take that for the record, and I am not familiar with the organization or as to why certain members, senior members have been told possibly not to participate. But that is something we could take for the record and supply you with an answer.

Senator BUDD. Glad to submit that and look forward to your response. Speaking of responses, thank you for getting back on my letter I recently submitted. I received this yesterday.

This is a letter my colleagues and I sent regarding the Administration's decision to permit taxpayer funding for and authorization

of travel to acquire abortions. The bottom line is, I just don't think this is an acceptable response.

Once again, the Department failed to answer the Committee's repeated requests for information, and instead we got what amounts to a form letter just repeating the new policies. We knew the policy, that is why I asked the questions.

So here is a few of the questions I would like for you to answer for the record. First, how many women or military families have refused to be stationed in Germany, South Korea, or any other country because of those nations' abortion laws?

Mr. CISNEROS. I don't have that information for you, Senator.

Senator BUDD. Okay. Well, if it is zero—if it is non-zero, would you please send information on that? Would you commit to sending information on that?

Mr. CISNEROS. I will commit to looking into that and seeing what the information is, if that is available. But that is not typically a question—

Senator BUDD. Just please let us know if there is zero information, or if there is information, let us know what that is. Does the Department have any data on women who felt deterred from joining the military for fear of being stationed at an installation or base in a State or nation that has restricted or restrictive abortion laws?

Mr. CISNEROS. We have had discussions, listening sessions with servicemembers who have let everybody know—

Senator BUDD. Secretary, any data on that?

Mr. CISNEROS. We also have a RAND report that they published and that the facts that they believe would happen from—well, the effects that the Dobbs decision would have on recruiting and retention.

Senator BUDD. If you would send that to us, because we have repeatedly requested it. It would seem like that would be a good report to have.

Mr. CISNEROS. We can share the RAND report.

Senator BUDD. Thank you very much. I appreciate that. What actions, if any, would the DOD take against a Commander that refused to facilitate the abortion of an unborn child in keeping with their sincerely held religious beliefs?

Mr. CISNEROS. Well, Senator, the Commander doesn't really know. When the servicemember is making a request, they are asking for reproductive health care. Now, reproductive health care, that can come in different forms. The Commander should not be digging into what the specific reason is why they are seeking reproductive health care.

Senator BUDD. The assumption was that it was known and it was against their sincerely held religious beliefs. Would the DOD take action against such a Commander?

Mr. CISNEROS. Well, again, the Commander should not know. They shouldn't be digging into that.

Senator BUDD. In the case that it was.

Mr. CISNEROS. But you now, to the—I would say if the Commander feels uncomfortable with kind of approving such a request, he can move it up the chain of command. But it is not the responsi-

bility of the Commander to put their religious beliefs onto servicemembers.

Senator BUDD. Yes, that really wasn't the question. But, you know, millions of Americans, myself included, are rightfully against the use of taxpayer funds to facilitate abortions. So, we will submit some more questions for the records. But in our final time here, what is being done to ensure that those kicked out of the military due to the vaccine mandate are able to rejoin, should they want to continue their service?

Mr. CISNEROS. Senator, there—that would be a question that could be better answered by the services. They are the ones carrying out those tasks.

But the secretary made it clear in his memorandum that servicemembers that put in a request for accommodation, whether it be administrative, religious, or medical reasons, that those, if a decision had been made, those requests would be pulled if it was purely for COVID 19, and that if other members that were separated request there is a process for them to apply to the board.

Well, to apply for one of the boards that the services have to ask to come back into the service or to have their DD214 adjusted, their—whether it be their status adjusted as far as their discharge status.

Senator BUDD. Okay. Thank you for being here, and I thank the panel. Chair Warren, I yield back.

Senator WARREN. Thank you. Senator Duckworth.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Madam Chairman, and good afternoon to our witnesses. Two years ago, gentlemen, I introduced legislation that ensured Guard and Reserve members receive the same monthly incentive, pay for maintaining the same critical skills and taking on the same hazardous duties as their counterparts in the Active component.

Reservists who qualify for these incentive pays work hard to maintain the same skills through the same standards as their Active Duty counterparts, often on time when they are not technically drilling. Yet, they are only currently paid 1/30th of the incentive pay that their Active Duty counterparts receive.

So, the situation is, for example, jump pay. You have to do three jumps a month as a paratrooper. A reservist goes out, he does three jumps in 1 day. An Active Duty troop goes out and does three jumps in 1 day. The Active Duty troops get \$150. The reservist gets \$5 bucks for the same three jumps.

This is an equity issue, and one that I am glad that my colleagues in this Committee voted in an overwhelmingly bipartisan way to address by including my bill in the Fiscal Year 2022 NDAA. Before implementing this section of the NDAA though, DOD must submit to Congress a report on its plan for providing equal incentive pays along with the certification that it will not negatively impact force structure.

This report was due 6 months ago, in September 30th of last year, yet Congress is still waiting for this report. Last October, after the deadline passed, I led a bipartisan and bicameral letter to Secretary Austin urging the Department to expeditiously issue its report and certification to Congress as required by law.

We are still waiting to hear from DOD on this. We are still waiting to pay our Reservists equitably for the critical skills and risks that they take to contribute to our military. Undersecretary Cisneros, how close is the Department to completing the report?

More importantly, how much longer would you like our Nation's Reserve component to wait before it is afforded incentive pay parity with their counterparts on Active Duty?

Mr. CISNEROS. Senator, thank you for the question there, and I know, I was a former tower officer, and then later they changed the name to full time support in the United States Navy, working with our reservists.

I know how hard they work and how dedicated they are to defending the Nation. You know, for that—but for that, I am going to turn over to Mr. Constable, who can—

Senator DUCKWORTH. Why are you 6 months late?

Mr. CONSTABLE. Senator, this is a conversation that has started many, many working groups, really, so we are very much aware of the requirement and apologies for the late report. We do anticipate meeting with the staff soon to talk through some of the impasses that we have reached based primarily on the realization in all camps that not all special skills, not all special pays are created equally or should be treated the same.

We just have to find the right mix of places where and we seek equal dollars versus equal consideration, and of course, all cognizant of creating incentives to draw people from one force to the other as one report has warned.

But we do owe you a report, and we do believe we are nearing a solution to propose.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Can you tell that in ordinary people speak as opposed to DOD speak? How—what is nearing, 6 more months, a year? I think you guys are slow rolling this because you don't want to implement it.

Mr. CONSTABLE. I think—not years, not months, Senator. I think the answer is weeks. Obviously faster when I go back than before I left the—

Senator DUCKWORTH. Less than 2 months?

Mr. CONSTABLE. I am going to have to return back—

Senator DUCKWORTH. I want to know.

Mr. CONSTABLE. Yes—

Senator DUCKWORTH. All right.

Mr. CONSTABLE. Yes, Senator, we are certainly getting with the staff—

Senator DUCKWORTH. Will you call me back within a week to tell me when the report will come?

Mr. CONSTABLE. I think it is ready for staff. I don't believe, Senator, it is ready for the Members quite yet.

Senator DUCKWORTH. When will it be ready for the members? When can you commit to?

Mr. CONSTABLE. I can commit to meeting with the staffs in weeks or less.

Senator DUCKWORTH. I will give you 4 weeks.

Mr. CONSTABLE. Senator.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Well, you need to do this. This idea that you can slow roll this, and that you are going to—that Active Duty

troops is going to leave the Active Duty to go to the Reserves because he is going to get \$150 bucks extra a month for three jobs is an insult to the troops who are on Active Duty, and it is still an insult to the troops who do those same three jobs every single month in order to make—to meet those standards. I am going to move on to my next question.

The military service has faced challenges in meeting their recruiting goals, in part due to a historically small pool of eligible recruits. This year I am introducing the ENLIST Act. This legislation enables the Department of Defense to expand its recruiting pool to include individuals like DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals] recipients and other longtime residents of this country who can pass a DOD background check and meet the service's high standards for enlistment while maintaining the Department's security standards.

The ENLIST Act will aid the service's recruitment efforts by allowing highly skilled and motivate individuals to succeed in the military. Undersecretary Cisneros, Mr. Constable, I would like to hear from each of you whether you think the ENLIST Act's expansion of the pool of possible recruits would benefit military recruitment efforts.

As a follow up for either of you, what other actions has the Department undertaken to bolster efforts to recruit diverse talents from across the Nation?

Mr. CISNEROS. Ma'am, Senator, we have tried this before, to try, so we are in support of trying to diversify our enlistment pool in order.

I know there are a number of kids, young students that have grown up here in the United States that consider themselves American citizens, that have really done nothing wrong, have good lives and have—want to serve.

So, you know, this is something that we have looked at in the past, that we tried to move through in the past, and we will continue to try and do it again.

Senator DUCKWORTH. You didn't answer my question. How about Mr. Constable?

Mr. CONSTABLE. Senator, the Department would support any effort to expand the recruiting pool, so we look forward to reading the details within your bill. In the \$40 million that we spoke of earlier that is contained in the President's Budget Request for JAMRS, in one part is really geared toward getting at some—more diverse populations.

We don't like leaving any money on the table or any population unchecked, especially with all the skills that they bring us or the opportunity to better reflect the American public. So, to that end, you should expect to see and demand to see more marketing, more advertising geared toward a broader population, and we look forward to your bill. Thank you.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Okay, Thank you. I am over time.

Senator WARREN. That is fine. Thank you. Senator Sullivan.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Madam Chair. Good to be on the committee. I want to thank the witnesses. I am going to follow up on Senator Duckworth's line of questioning for Mr. Cisneros, Ms.

Skelly, and Mr. Constable, and if this has already been talked about, I apologize for getting in here late.

But we have this recruiting problem right now, and I don't have to tell you, but the Army's 2022 recruiting goal was missed by 25 percent. So far this year, the Army, Navy, and Air Force are projected to miss their 2023 targets. I am really interested in what you think is going on.

There are different theories. It is the economy. There is, you know, I think there is cultural issues, right. If you tell everybody every day in The Washington Post and The New York Times that the military is full of extremists, which oh, by the way, it isn't, let's just get that one right, you are going to have people go, well, geez, I don't want to send my young son and daughter there, right.

The Army deserves some credit developing its soldier prep course, which I think has been successful. The Navy seems to be taking a different approach, which is dropping its standards to as low as they can go. Not really wise, in my view. The Marine Corps hasn't missed its recruiting goals, but I don't think they are out of the woods yet. So, what do you think is happening and how do we need to get on it?

I do think that the average man and woman, young man or woman in America who wants to serve, they want to deploy, they want to defend their country, they want to fight, right. So, I think we can't lose that aspect of trying to recruit for the men and women who want to do it.

We don't have to go too far afield to say, oh, we are going to do all these other appeals. We should appeal to the patriotism and desire that has been in this country for 200 plus years to deploy and fight for their country. I think that is how you get good recruiting numbers. But what do you guys think?

Mr. CISNEROS. Senator, thanks for the question and again for the opportunity to kind of talk about recruiting. We know there are some challenges out there right now.

One of the things that we are seeing in the research that we have is that there is definitely a military civilian divide, you know, as Senator Duckworth said, right. That the recruiting pool is getting less and less, smaller and smaller of those who are qualified.

Senator SULLIVAN. So, they are not qualified because they are overweight. They have a low ASVAB [Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery] score. What is it?

Mr. CISNEROS. That—well, those are two things right there, sir. Right there. It is the—they are not meeting the academic standards. They are not meeting the physical fitness standards. But then we are also seeing that, you know, 30 years ago, 40 percent of people between the ages of 16 to 24 knew somebody who had served in the military.

That is only 15 percent right now. They don't know what the military is. They don't understand what it is about. That was why earlier we talked about, you know, we have got to do a better job of going out and telling our story and the benefits of military service.

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes. Great story.

Mr. CISNEROS. It changed my life. It put me on a different trajectory, and I know it has done that for thousands of people.

Senator SULLIVAN. So, are you viewing the soldier prep course as an answer that other services can maybe emulate?

Mr. CISNEROS. I think the—well, the Army would probably better talk about that later on, but that is one of the things that they saw. They saw there was a need to help students academically, to help them get in better shape in order so they can meet those standards. From what I understand is the Navy is talking about emulating that program as well.

Senator SULLIVAN. So, any other thoughts, Mr. Constable and Ms. Skelly?

Mr. CONSTABLE. Senator, I want to point out one specific initiative we have had, and that is the Medical Assistance Review Pilot.

This is where we are questioning the conventions that have constrained us over the years just simply because we know more than we used to, especially with electronic health records. That is where we used to say, if you have had asthma at any point, you are not eligible.

So, we questioned all of those, working closely, of course, with the medical team to define where we can assume a little less, looking at the data to where these people would qualify, and that has brought thousands more in.

Senator SULLIVAN. Good. What about, this is a topic I have been—on that topic, on mental health, right. Right now, I know for a fact that certain services, and I have been asking this question through the Armed Services Committee, but we disqualify young men and women, some services, if they have seen a psychiatrist or if they have been on medicine for mental health.

Yet we want them to try to improve their mental health, right. How are we thinking about that in a way that would not just say, oh, you were on medicine for 6 months, you saw a psychiatrist, young high school kid, you are disqualified. Because then, that is just the wrong message. They are either going to lie or they are going to not seek help.

Mr. CISNEROS. There is, as Mr. Constable said, there are a lot of things that we have looked to reevaluate that we are trying to work with the services to expand that.

Senator SULLIVAN. Is that one?

Mr. CISNEROS. I believe it is one. One of the things that we are trying to do within the military is destigmatize mental health. The Secretary says all the time, mental health is health. We want people to come forward when they need—they feel they need to talk to somebody or they need to see a professional.

We don't want them to—you know, used to always be if you said you had a problem, they would just automatically take your security clearance away or ground you from flying the aircraft.

We don't want that to be the case anymore. We have been working hard to change that and to make it so that people will come forward and deal with their health issues.

Senator WARREN. Good. Thank you. Senator Blumenthal.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I want to follow up on exactly that question because frankly, I can well envision you would rather have someone who sought help than someone who denied the need for it. Said, I am fine, but I want

to shoot up a classroom or whatever and is not going to talk about that when they come to a recruiter.

So, you say you are working hard. What are you doing and what is your timetable for specific steps? I am not here to sort of put you on the spot, but I would like a written response with specifics as to what you were doing to change those qualifications and on what basis for mental health. Because I think the question raised by Senator Sullivan is absolutely critical.

Mr. CISNEROS. Yes, Senator, we can provide you with that. But you know, there are some great programs that the service has had, that they implemented. One I always like to talk about is the Air Force's True North, where they put in counselors within their squadrons to provide individuals to talk to when they need the counseling or just to talk about their issues.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. That is for Active Duty members.

Mr. CISNEROS. Yes.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. But what about the recruit who will come to see the Marine Corps recruiting officer or the Navy recruiting officer and say, yes, I had—I went for help. What happens to that person?

Mr. CISNEROS. Well, Senator, like I said, we can provide you with a written response. I can turn over to Dr. Martinez Lopez, who might be able to comment on that. But we are working with the services. We are working with them to try and expand. We were able to come to agreement on 38 different issues, whether it be asthma or whether it be ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder].

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Okay. I don't have time in to hear about all of that. I want to focus on mental health, because mental health, as the Secretary has said, is—should be regarded the same as physical health.

So, if somebody broke a leg and they said, yes, I broke a leg, I played football, you know, I was out for 6 months. I am fine now. You would take them. If someone says, yes, I had a problem, I went to see—I went to see a shrink, and it really helped. That is the kind of story that should be regarded in the same way.

But I want to relate this issue to a very specific one, and that is the suicides of sailors on the USS *George Washington*. Three sailors died by suicide while that ship was undergoing maintenance and repairs. One of them was Xavier Sandor from Connecticut.

His dad has been pummeling the Department of Defense for information about what is being done to better the conditions of sailors when their ship is not at sea, when it is being repaired. He was forced to live on this ship while it was being repaired. Like living in an apartment that is being renovated.

He couldn't sleep. He was in bad shape and he didn't get help. The Department of Defense is doing an investigation or an inquiry. Do you have the results?

Mr. CISNEROS. Senator, we don't have the results to the inquiry or the investigation that the Navy is doing. I believe that is still ongoing. I believe that would be a better question for the Navy and the second panel as to what they are doing and the improvements that they are trying to make for those—

Senator BLUMENTHAL. My understanding is that the work has been finished, and that it is under review. Can you tell me why it hasn't been made available to the father of the young man who lost his life?

Mr. CISNEROS. Senator, I can't do that right now. I don't—I haven't seen the report myself.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Can you look into it?

Mr. CISNEROS. We can see what we can do. We can take that for the record. But I believe, again, that would be a better question for the Navy as to where they are with that report and what are they looking into.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. They say it is under review. We are coming up on the 1-year anniversary of his death, April 15, and for all you have said about your paying attention to this issue of mental health—by the way, these three sailors are not the only ones.

There have been other suicides on other ships similarly situated in home ports for repair or maintenance. This is a specific kind of circumstance where you are losing life in real time. So, to wait a year for a report makes no sense.

Mr. CISNEROS. Senator, look, any loss of life through suicide or any—through any means is a terrible tragedy, and it does weigh heavily on our military family. But I am sorry that I don't have the answers for you why that report is still under review. Again, we can take that for the record and try and get you a better answer.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Well, my time is over and I just want to ask you to commit that you will provide someone to meet with John Sander, who lost his son to suicide on the USS *Washington* when he comes down because I am going to invite him down and I want him to be able to meet someone from the Department of Defense. Will you make someone available?

Mr. CISNEROS. Senator, we will try and see what we can do to make some available to meet the individual.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Ok. Thank you.

Senator WARREN. Thank you. Senator Kelly.

Senator KELLY. Thank you, Madam Chair. Secretary Cisneros, good to see you. Thank you for being here. Last year, we discussed the implementation of section 704 of the NDAA we passed in 2021, otherwise known as the Brandon Act, which improves the ability of servicemembers to quickly obtain mental health care.

It also reduces stigma and provides needed training. The Brandon Act is named for fallen United States Navy Petty Officer Third Class Brandon Caserta, of Peoria, Arizona. He was a dedicated young sailor. He did all the right things as he was trying to deal with his mental health issues.

He suffered some significant mental health problems. He was discouraged and ridiculed, and then tragically took his own life. Now, I have been working closely with Brandon's parents, Terry and Patrick, on this issue. They were in my office just about a week ago, and we share serious concerns about the suicide epidemic, as does Senator Blumenthal and Senator Sullivan, and I am sure everybody on this Committee.

We need to use every tool that we have to fight this challenge, and one of those tools is the Brandon Act that was in the defense bill last year. So now I know we have spoken about this before, but

I am concerned there haven't been visible signs of progress on implementing the Brandon Act.

I have raised this with you and Service Secretaries in the past. Last year I added to the defense bill a requirement for a formal progress report on DOD's implementation efforts. That was due on March 1st. I think today is the 15th. So, Secretary Cisneros, why has the Committee not yet received your implementation report as required by the defense bill? Are there any updates that you can provide to me today about what actions the Department is taking to implement the requirements of the Brandon Act?

Senator WARREN. Senator, thank you for that question, and as, you know, we stated earlier, any death by suicide is definitely a tragedy and it really does weigh heavily on our military family. We are trying to make improvements.

Congress is really kind of given the stability with the Suicide Prevention and Independent Review Commission that we were able to complete at the end of last year. We can have Ms. Foster kind of talk about that a little bit, if you would like, but we are making progress on the Brandon Act.

To do that, and to talk about it I will turn over to Dr. Martinez Lopez who can kind of give you an update on that, sir.

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Senator, thank you for the question. We need to honor Brandon Caserta. There is no question about that, and the best way to honor is through you putting into effect the law.

I am new at the job, been there for 3 weeks, but I can tell you that the long pole on the tent was the issue of the law brought everybody, including the individual ready reserve, that have no command and control, so we were trying to figure out how to implement the law, including all the servicemembers.

What I recommended, and I think we are moving forward, what we are going to do first is going to break the Active Duty and let's go. We move in that axis right away. Then as we come out with a solution set for the Reserve components, those have a command structure next, and then the IRR [Individual Ready Reserve], because there are issues of care and there is a lot of—so we are moving, and I guess—

Senator KELLY. Mr. Secretary, you are talking about how the Brandon Act will be implemented.

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Yes, sir.

Senator KELLY. But my first question was, we were supposed to get a progress report on the implementation. That certainly could be what you said here, could have been in the progress report. We were supposed to receive that on March 1st. We are now 2 weeks past that. We have not received it. So, when could we expect the report on the progress of the implementation?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Senator, we talked—we started talking to the staff. Hopefully very soon, in the next month or so you are going to see the report coming to you of how we—hopefully before that, of how we are implementing the Act. But I just gave you the kind of the scope of how we are approaching it.

Senator KELLY. So, in a month or two, we could expect the progress report on the implementation.

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Yes, sir.

Senator KELLY. All right. You talked a little bit about the implementation. So, I am interested in seeing that and in detail, about what are we doing to make sure that what we passed in legislation, how it is going to be implemented. Anything else you might need from us, you could add that as well.

Because this is such a serious issue. I mean, it is not only in the Navy. I mean in DOD, this is a major problem. It is affecting readiness, but that is not the reason to do it. I mean, the reason to implement this is it is the right thing to do and it will save people's lives. So, thank you.

Senator WARREN. Thank you. Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Madam Chair, Ranking Member Scott, and to the witnesses for being here. I just want to pick up on Senator Kelly's on the Brandon Act, because this occurred in Virginia.

I have also met with the Casertas, and just, you know, to put a really fine point on this. They have lost their child under unimaginably horrific circumstances. They are turning that grief into an effort to try to do something to help others. If we pass a law but do not implement it, it is a revictimization of a family that doesn't deserve to be revictimized.

They will view that as yet another pain that they are suffering at the hands of the United States military. So, this needs to be done because we have a significant challenge, and I am going to get into another dimension of this. But it also needs to be done so that a family that has already suffered doesn't suffer more.

I just echo what Senator Kelly said. We need to see that report about implementation. We need to see it soon. We need to understand that this is not some box checking thing that people are doing just to appease us, but you are doing it to meet a need that is a very significant one.

I have recently had two strings of really difficult suicides within the Navy in Hampton Roads, Virginia. So just in one community. Sailors aboard the *George Washington* who trained for an MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] and thought they would be doing something, but instead because the *George Washington* has been in this limited duty status for so long, many of them are there and will have their whole career while the ship is getting refurbished, not doing what they thought they might do.

A sense of purposelessness can grow. That can exacerbate other challenges. The living situations for folks when their ships are in dry dock getting refurb aren't necessarily the best. Then we had 4 suicides within a space of 5 weeks, with sailors who had been assigned to the Mid-Atlantic Regional Maintenance Center in Norfolk.

This is a center, one of seven or eight in the United States that they are kind of like MacGyver. It is a really great mission where they take things, off ships and subs that are busted. Instead of paying millions to do something new, they can figure out a way to fix it and get it back on.

It is an important mission, but it is very unusual in the way it has been composed. Of the 2,500 people who work at MARMC [Mid Atlantic Regional Maintenance Center], half are civilians who are under contract. They know how long they are going to be there.

Half are sailors. Of the sailors, half have been assigned to the mission, but half were assigned there under a limited duty status.

Maybe they were pregnant, maybe they broke a bone, maybe they had a disciplinary issue, and so, they were pulled out of the fleet and assigned there. Most of that, nearly 600 people in the limited duty status at MARMC, they have no idea when they are going back to the fleet. They may be in a med board process that is completely opaque and they don't have a sense of when it will be over.

That then builds up some sense of purposelessness when you don't know what your next step is and you don't know when you will know, you are not only don't know, but you don't know when you will know, then that can also contribute to significant mental health challenges. That is why, no surprise, those four suicides in this workforce of 2,500. It wasn't civilians.

It wasn't the sailors that were assigned there for a traditional tour. It was all people within this limited duty population who were living in a world of kind of big question mark about what would happen to them.

So, I guess I would like to ask particularly to being with the Navy, when we have members of the armed services who were assigned into limited duty status, what can we do to make sure that they have the support they need while they are in that status?

Because there were no embedded mental health professionals in this workforce of 2,500, even though 600 of them were on a limited duty status, each one different from the next, each one with a lot of questions about their future. What can we do with our limited duty to provide them the services they need?

Mr. CISNEROS. Senator, thank you for that, and again, as the Secretary says all the time, mental health is health, and we want to ensure that we are taking care of our servicemembers that have needs.

I will turn it over to Dr. Martinez Lopez here. But, any servicemember that needs to see a physician can always go and talk. It is not just whether it is the people that need to seek mental health, right.

We have counselors for people who are having financial problems, if they are having relationship problem, the individuals are there for them to go in to talk to. But I will turn it over to Dr. Martinez Lopez specifically to talk about the mental health and what individuals need to do in order to seek help.

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Senator, very good question. I think we are taking the approach of the public health approach, and you are right on target, which is it is not a medical issue, it is a poly health. We all play. The Commander plays. There are financial issues, social issues. There are medical issues.

We need to address all of those. Think about it like a rucksack that has a lot of stuff that is heavy and we need to figure out how to level that rucksack. So, if there is a financial thing that we can do to help that sailor, that is one thing. If there is a social, family issue that we can help them with, let's go and relieve that.

If it is a legal issue that they are dealing with, let's go and try to—and by doing that, we decrease the risk, you know, of that sail-

ors, soldiers—sailor, airmen, marine or guardian, from—that is part of the equation to this conundrum.

So, I think we are on the right track in that respect. A lot of work to be done, a lot of education. It is a never-ending process. But I am confident that we need to keep sailing in that direction and trying to make head ways.

Senator WARREN. Right. Thank you.

Senator Kaine. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator WARREN. Thank you. I think our ranking member has a comment.

Senator SCOTT. Well, first off, I want to—Senator Duckworth. Senator Budd, and I think Senator Kelly, I mean, they all asked things—they would like to be more responsive, so I hope you guys will do your best to be more responsive. The other thing is, we go through the National Defense Authorization Act.

We are just trying to get stuff in there every year, and some of it are reports. If you are not going to get a report on time, I mean, I think the first thing you probably ought to do is tell us, and tell us why. Because we are not doing it because we don't care. We are doing it because we care.

So, I think if you are not going get a report, I would like—I mean, I think all of us would like to know it. I think this Committee is going to actually work to try to figure out how we have—people want to serve. So, and I let me—I went through what Senator Kaine was talking about in dry dock.

I was in dry dock. My ship was in dry dock, and it is boring. It is really boring and it seems like there ought to be a way to send people to training and do things like that rather than just—we just sat around and did nothing. It wasn't like the ship was at risk. I mean, we are in a dry dock area.

Nobody could get there. So, they didn't need us to show up and hold a gun every so often. So, but thanks, everybody for—

Senator WARREN. So, I agree. I really want to associate myself with the remarks. It is very frustrating when we get things into NDAA that is something we have all worked on to make it happen, and then we don't get answers, that is a real problem for all of us.

So, the commitment specifically that Senator Duckworth has extracted and that others have asked for, regard that as something the whole Committee is behind and we expect her to get her answers in a timely fashion.

We are going to do a second round with this panel, for those of us who want to do a second round of questions, I want to do a second round. Are you good?

Senator SCOTT. I am good.

Senator WARREN. You are good, you are good, and I think, Senator Duckworth. So, we have got two more rounds and then we will go to the second panel that we have got here. So, the U.S. military should have the best doctors in the entire world.

In a crisis, these are the medical professionals who are on the front lines. But unlike doctors who are at a really busy place like Mass General or Boston Medical Center, military doctors don't have a constant stream of servicemembers with serious injuries coming in the front door.

Now, it is a good thing that fewer servicemembers are suffering serious injury, but it is also a problem for the doctors because it means they get less practice stitching people up or setting broken bones or doing emergency surgery to repair gunshot wounds.

One of the keyways that military doctors and surgeons maintain their skills is by treating civilians at military treatment facilities, or MTFs. Now, Dr. Martinez Lopez, how does DOD benefit from treating civilian patients?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Thank you very much, Senator. That is extremely important to us. A way—you know, from the standpoint of readiness, we need to keep all the docs and all nurses. It is not just the docs.

It is a whole team that has to be sharp. By taking care of civilians, we do two things. One is the readiness piece, but also the good neighbor piece. I mean, like in San Antonio, if there is an emergency and they show up in our doorsteps, we have the good neighbor responsibility to provide good care to them too.

But so, we need to, as you said, we need to bring about more patients, especially trauma patients. San Antonio is a perfect place where we do world class burn care and also trauma care, and hopefully we never have to use those abroad, but if we do, our team will be ready to deploy and do that, right. So—

Senator WARREN. Good. So, we want you to be sharp, and we want to have the chance to train as a team on an ongoing basis. We want you to be able to be designated as trauma centers because your level is that high in terms of your practice.

In other words, treating civilians, for the military to treat civilians is supposed to be a win-win. The civilian patient gets world class care and military doctors stay up to date on their skills. It is not working out so well for patients.

Most of them are dropped off at the MTF in an ambulance because they need emergency treatment, and the MTF is the best closest option. Two-thirds of civilians who end up at an MTF care do not have any insurance. The military treatment facility sticks these patients with massive bills.

If the cost isn't waived, Federal law requires aggressive debt collection, including garnishing patients' wages or seizing tax refunds, or even taking 15 percent of their Social Security checks before it even reaches their pockets. Now, the good news is the DOD now has authority to waive these debts.

Dr. Martinez Lopez, over the last 5 years, military treatment facilities treated almost 30,000 civilian emergency patients. For how many of those 30,000 patients did DOD exercise its authority to waive civilian medical debt, keeping in mind two-thirds of these folks do not have insurance.

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Ma'am, a very small number. I think 57.

Senator WARREN. Fifty-seven. That is exactly right, 57 times DOD waived medical debt out of 30,000 people who came in and incurred these debts. You know, so DOD is actually waiving debt, I tried to work this out, in about 0.2 percent of the cases.

Now, DOD claimed that their number is low because waiver authority was too narrow. That the debt could only be waived if there was, "direct and compelling relationship to a priority DOD objective," not just that someone can't pay. So, to address this problem,

Representative Castro and I got an amendment into the 2021 NDAA, some of you remember this, to expand DOD's authority to waive medical bills.

Our changes clarified that if medical treatment for civilians will enhance military medical readiness overall, and if the patient is unable to pay, DOD has legal authority just to tear up the bill. Dr. Martinez Lopez, how often has DOD exercised this expanded authority to waive costs for civilians when the treatment will enhance readiness and the patient is unable to pay?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Ma'am, I don't know for sure, but I don't think we have done many, if any.

Senator WARREN. Yes, so it kind of looks like it is zero right now. Look, DOD is dragging its feet on—while these patients are toppling into financial ruin. The GAO [Government Accountability Office] also found that DOD wasn't telling patients that they had an option for relief, as required by DOD's own regulations, and they weren't properly tracking people when they had or had not paid their bills.

So, Dr. Martinez Lopez, on this new notion that we are really going to start holding people accountable in this Committee, can I have your commitment that you are going to clean this up, start wiping out medical debts for civilians who shouldn't have been hit with those devastating bills to begin with, and you are going to get back to me on this?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Senator, I don't want to put more burden, and my colleagues are in the same boat, on patients that already have been traumatized. That is not what we are in. I mean—and worse, they cannot even pay. So why do we want to keep adding insult to many of those? So, we thank you for this waiver.

As I understand right now, we are talking to a rulemaking. I will try to figure out how can I expedite that rulemaking to give the solution set that you want and we want. So, I commit that I will work hard to get through the process in DOD and start affecting in a nice way the patients that we care for.

Senator WARREN. I understand your heart is in the right place. I am not quarreling with your heart. I got to have your actions in the right place. So, I am going to ask for the same thing that Senator Duckworth asked for.

Can you get back to me in 4 weeks and at least lay out what the plan is to make certain that patients are fully informed about the opportunity to have their debts wiped out, and what DOD's plan is to implement what we all work to put into the law in 2021?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. I will get back to you, ma'am.

Senator WARREN. Four weeks, just to tell me what the plan is. I am not even asking you for the final report. I am—just tell me what the plan is.

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. I will be glad to talk to your staff or yourself in 4 weeks.

Senator WARREN. Okay, we got it. Secretary Duckworth. I am sorry, Senator Duckworth.

[Laughter.]

Senator DUCKWORTH. Old job, Assistant Secretary of the VA—old job.

[Laughter.]

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Madam Chair. Gentlemen, servicemembers commit their lives to defend our country, and they should not struggle to feed their families. Yet in July 2022, the DOD released an updated report that found that 24 percent of all Active Duty servicemembers experienced some level of food insecurity in 2020 and 2021, with our junior enlisted facing the highest risk.

That is why I introduced a bipartisan Military Family Nutrition Access Act last month. This bill eliminates basic allowance for housing from income calculations under the SNAP program.

So right now, if you apply for SNAP, they count your BAH [Basic Allowance for Housing] as income, even though other programs like Medicaid and the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] doesn't consider your BAH to be income. By using an already established nutrition assistance program and simply updating the treatment of BAH so it is in line with other Federal assistance programs, we will expand nutrition access to more military families so that they can qualify for SNAP benefits.

Undersecretary Cisneros, Assistant Secretary Skelly, do you consider food insecurity and a lack of access to nutrition among a significant percentage of military families to be a readiness issue? Remember, your own report is at 24 percent.

Mr. CISNEROS. Secretary, I think food insecurity is definitely an issue, and it is something that we are working hard to help resolve them. You know, the Secretary put out a series of memos kind of addressing different things about taking care of our people. One of them was around food insecurity, and it was about kind of really trying to provide.

You know, while the research that we have kind of shows that where a lot of those happens is when PCS happens, servicemembers are—their families that have to move. The spouse usually has to give up a job.

That puts a burden or puts a financial strain on the families and kind of makes the food insecurity—or maybe they are not getting good quality, healthy food all the time there until they are able to get new employment. But this is something that we are working on.

We are working to try and ensure that spouses have access to employment, whether it be through just being able to transfer, if they have a job within DOD, or other Federal Government agencies and being able to remote work or telework or partnering with over 600 companies that have made a commitment to hiring spouses as well to relieve some of the strain.

But, we definitely see it as an impact and as an issue, when families do have struggle to help provide their families with healthy meals.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Would you support increasing greater access to SNAP benefits for military families, as would be granted by my Act? Basically, that says for when you apply for SNAP, SNAP should not consider BAH as income because no other part of Federal Government does either.

Mr. CISNEROS. Ma'am, it sounds very interesting, but I would have to look at the legislation in your proposal before we make any commitment to that.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Okay. Well, we will get you to that in less than 6 months. My next question, Assistant Secretary Martinez Lopez, I know that you have only been in your seat for a short time. Welcome. I led a CODEL [Congressional Delegation] to Japan and Indonesia last month to discuss a wide range of issues with our partners, including energy security, economic engagement, and people to people academic exchanges. However, while I was in Japan, I heard from DOD civilians about the struggles that they are now facing accessing health care due to a rules change at their local military treatment facilities. What is being done by your office to resolve these issues in Japan?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Senator, thank you very much. I think the health care of not only the servicemembers and their families is important, also the civilians that help us is a team. I think we have grown that piece of the team larger and larger not only overseas but giving more opportunities to civilians to help us.

We have been compensated along. The MTFs are just—the force structure is just to take care of the Active dUty and the family members. So, what we do is we increase efficiencies of those clinics to see—create space available to then see the civilians. We haven't changed the policy.

It is the same policy that has been standing for many years. So, what we have done is we increased it—we are working hard to increase the efficiency of those clinics, so more space available will be for the civilian. But that is just a Band-Aid.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Well, but what I heard from them is actually the opposite, that they have recently—that they were being seen at the facilities and the facilities that actually turn around and said, no, we are not going to see you anymore, you go on into the economy in Tokyo and find your own doctors.

Not that they are not great doctors in Tokyo, but frankly, with language and capacities, they are now no longer being able to access health care.

Mr. CISNEROS. Ma'am, Senator, if I may, I went to Japan recently. I did five town halls. I heard both in mainland Japan and Okinawa talking about this issue. As Dr. Martinez has stated, right, that our policy hasn't changed.

The civilians and the contractors have always been seen on a space available basis. What we had done was we had sent out a message through the DHA, the Defense Health Agency, is because we were hearing that from our servicemembers and from their families is that they were having trouble getting appointments and they are our top priority there.

But what we have done, as Dr. Martinez stated, is we have asked the MTFs there in Japan to maximize their efficiencies, to open up, make more appointments available so that those that are seen on a space available will have more of a chance to go and to get that access and to get that health care as well.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Will you be doing this around the world for all of our duty civilians?

Mr. CISNEROS. It is—we are looking at—I think Japan is, what we learned, is very unique. The cultural differences there is, the way they provide health care as to what we are used for is defi-

nately different. The language barrier creates a big—it is a big challenge there.

But it is something that we are looking at. My deputy was just recently in Germany, kind of looking at some of the same issues. But the space available is everywhere throughout, you know—that is everywhere throughout the Department of Defense. It is not just specific to Japan.

But we are working to go and increase, and to see what we can do to provide other opportunities, whether it is providing like a clinic through AVs that could see patients, or partnering with an organization like we do with our defense, with our servicemembers.

Make an organization available that will help them seek the health care that they need out in their community like we do for our servicemembers when we don't have access to that type of health care, and they need a certain type of health care and we just can't provide it at that location.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Could you have your point—

Senator WARREN. We need to wrap this up, if we can. Okay, thank you. Thank you. I appreciate all of you being here, Ms. Foster, Secretary Skelly, appreciate your being here even though any questions didn't come to you. The first panel is excused, and we would like to bring up the second panel, please.

Everybody ready? Good. Thank you all for being here. So, our second panel consists of Assistant Secretaries of the military departments for Manpower and Reserve Affairs. Each of our witnesses is going to do a brief opening statement, I believe.

Can I start with you, Ms. Schaefer, Assistant Secretary of the Army. Are you ready?

Dr. SCHAEFER. I am.

Senator WARREN. Good.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE AGNES G. SCHAEFER, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY FOR MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS**

Dr. SCHAEFER. Chairwoman Warren, Ranking Member Scott, Distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the men and women of the United States Army.

At the end of the summer of 2022, the Senate confirmed me to be the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, and I joined an amazing Army team that works tirelessly every day to improve the lives of our soldiers, civilians, and families.

I bring both deep and broad expertise to my current position, as well as a renewed emphasis on leveraging data and analysis to assess the effectiveness of our policies and programs, to better target our resources in alignment with the Secretary of the Army's main six objectives.

Between my previous position as a Senior Advisor to the current Deputy Secretary of Defense, and my 16 years at RAND supporting the Department of Defense through research and analysis, my focus every day for years has been on improving our Army's readiness to meet the objectives of our national security strategy, and

to improve the lives of our Active and Reserve component members and their families.

In my current role, these continue to be my focus in the service of our soldiers, civilians, and their families. My three priorities are readiness, including quality of life and prevention of harmful behaviors, manning the Army of 2030, and the strategic modernization of our personnel, policies, processes, and systems across the entire spectrum of our Army people strategy.

Readiness ensures that we have the ability to project combat power whenever, wherever it is required. Manning the Army of 2030 requires not only the new weapons systems and doctrines to succeed in the future of warfare, but also the people who have the appropriate skills and competencies for tomorrow, not just today.

Strategic modernization includes how we recruit and hire, how we grow, employ, and manage talent, and how we create a workplace culture that enables people to thrive and want to expand their careers in the Army. The Army's mission remains unchanged, to fight and win our Nation's wars.

We are building the Army of 2030, and in doing so, taking care of our people because they are the foundation of our great Army and our No. 1 priority. The future of multi-domain operations requires highly trained, agile, and resilient personnel across the total force.

Active guard, Reserve, and civilians, people perform the best when they are part of cohesive teams founded on treating everyone with dignity and respect.

All of the Army's personnel programs and initiatives are focused on this because we lead with our values, and in doing so is essential to the readiness required to accomplish our mission.

Chairwoman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for your unwavering bipartisan support of our outstanding soldiers, civilians, and their families. I look forward to our discussion on our questions today, as well as continuing this conversation in the future.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Schaefer follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY DR. AGNES GEREBEN SCHAEFER

Chairwoman Warren, Ranking Member Scott, Distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the men and women of the United States Army.

At the end of December 2022, the Senate confirmed me to be the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower & Reserve Affairs and I joined an amazing Army team that works tirelessly every day to improve the lives of our Army soldiers, civilians, and their families. I bring both deep and broad expertise to my current position, as well as a renewed emphasis on leveraging data and analysis to assess the effectiveness of our policies and programs to better target our resources, in alignment with the Secretary's second objective. Between my positions in the Deputy Secretary of Defense office, my research at RAND, my focus every day for years has been on improving our military's readiness to meet the objectives of our national security strategy, and to improve the lives of our Active and Reserve component members and their families.

In my current role, these continue to be my focus in service of our soldiers, civilians, and their families. In addition, my overarching priority is the strategic modernization of our personnel policies, processes and systems. This includes the modernization of policies, processes and systems across the entire spectrum of our Army People Strategy (Acquire, Develop, Employ and Retain), including how we recruit and hire; how we grow, employ and manage talent; and how we create a workplace culture that allows people to thrive and want to expand their careers in the Army.

It also includes prioritizing cross-cutting issues such as increased permeability across the Total Force; increased flexibility in talent management and career opportunities; and better matching of individuals' competencies with civilian and military career fields.

While we undoubtedly need to maintain our focus on some immediate issues and concerns, we cannot afford to lose sight of longer-term strategic policies, processes, and systems that will enable us to recruit the competencies and skill sets necessary to build the future Army, maintain healthy career pipelines over the long-term, and ensure both immediate and longer-term readiness in the face of increasingly varied and complex challenges.

The Army's mission remains unchanged, to fight and win our Nation's wars. We are building the Army of 2030 and in doing so, taking care of our people because they are the foundation. The Army of 2030 requires highly trained, resilient, and healthy teammates across the Total Force—Active, Guard, Reserve, and Civilians. People perform their best when they are part of cohesive teams founded on treating others with dignity and respect. Therefore, the Army's No. 1 priority is our people—our soldiers, Army civilians, families, and veteran soldiers for life. All the Army's personnel programs and initiatives are focused on taking care of our people, because we lead with our values, and doing so is essential to the readiness required to accomplish our mission.

#### BUILDING THE ARMY OF 2030

The Army of 2030 will provide the Joint Force with trained and ready forces capable of combined arms maneuver in a multi-domain operating environment. Building the Army of 2030 while maintaining readiness, depends on a quality all-volunteer force. The Army is taking active measures to overcome unprecedented recruiting challenges without compromising standards. We will continue to develop and implement innovative ideas to identify high quality recruits and investing in the youth of America.

#### *Military Accessions*

Investing in the Army of 2030 requires investing in our youth and helping them realize their full potential. In fiscal year 2022, the Army enlisted 44,901 recruits in the Active Component (AC), 24,829 recruits in the Army National Guard (ARNG), and 9,095 recruits in the United States Army Reserve (USAR). As of February 27, 2023, the AC achieved more than 25 percent of its fiscal year 2023 recruiting mission of 65,500. The ARNG achieved more than 38 percent of its fiscal year 2023 recruiting mission of 30,880. The USAR achieved more than 23 percent of its recruiting mission of 14,650.

The recruiting challenges facing the Army are not new, and are not based on a single cause. Several of the trends we are observing and responding to are years in the making. We are in an intense competition for talent. Some of the benefits that long set the Army apart from the private sector, are becoming more common. Pandemic-specific challenges also changed the recruiting environment, and young Americans' perception of work. The Army is addressing each of these challenges head-on.

For instance, the Future Soldier Preparatory Course (FSPC) is an investment in America's youth. FSPC is a holistic program that assists potential recruits meet either the physical or academic aptitude standards to fully qualify for Army service. In fiscal year 2023, as of the 8 March, 6,883 trainees have enrolled in both the academic and fitness components of FSPC. Of those, 4,784 graduated and moved on to Basic Combat Training (BCT) with an average Armed Forces Qualification Test score improvement of 19.4 points. Within the fitness component of FSPC, the average weekly body fat loss is 1.5 percent. Across both the physical and academic components, 130 soldiers graduated Advanced Individual Training as of 8 March 2023.

We are also investing in our recruiters by selecting recruiters differently, improving their training, increasing their resources, and educating their families on those resources available to them. Other initiatives to improve our recruiting efforts include the development of the Soldier Referral Program to provide an opportunity for soldiers in the Active Army, USAR, and ARNG to connect with youth where they are, share their Army story, and be rewarded when referred recruit join the Army. In January 2023, the Army began the Recruiter Production Incentive—Assignment Incentive Pay to incentivize recruiters to exceed their quarterly recruiting mission. This new program earns the recruiter financial incentive for different categories of recruits brought in above the mission.

The Army is also carefully monitoring, and, adjusting incentives to position itself as a highly desirable employer of choice. We are adjusting enlistment bonuses to help recruit into critical skills specialties. Recruits can combine multiple enlistment

bonuses and can combine up to four different incentives. Training of choice and station of choice remain the most popular incentives.

#### *Civilian Workforce Recruiting*

Our civilian workforce is a force multiplier across the Total Army and our investments into its capabilities are crucial for meeting the needs of the Army of 2030. The Army has implemented several initiatives to reduce civilian time-to-hire in support of the former Secretary of Defense's fiscal year 2025 hiring goal of 45 days. The Civilian Implementation Plan within the Army People Strategy places specific emphasis and focus on reducing time-to-hire to ensure the Army is competitive for top talent with other employers. A multi-year strategy to execute tasks supporting the Civilian Implementation Plan is in progress. These efforts will assess hiring quality, leverage Office of Personnel Management resources, and optimize Civilian Human Resources Agency and Command civilian hiring operations. As our multi-year strategy to reduce the time to hire matures, we expect to achieve consistent reductions in the time it takes to hire civilian personnel.

#### *Marketing*

The Army is about possibilities and investing in oneself for a better life. The Army offers 178 career fields as options for recruits, and Army Marketing is laser-focused on re-introducing the Army to America's youth. Our research informs us that potential recruits have gaps in knowledge about what Army service can offer, trouble identifying with service culture and lifestyle, and diminished trust that they will be treated fairly. However, the top concerns amongst the audience of potential recruits continue to be that serving in the Army will either delay or put them off-track from their life goals, and that they will be separated from friends and family.

The Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army have just announced the Army's first new brand refresh effort since "Army Strong" nearly 20 years ago. This new effort was the culmination of 2 years of research and preparation to bring the Army back to relevancy in the minds of Generation Z and others. The Army conducted extensive research among prospects and our important stakeholder audiences and influencers before deciding on the elements of this brand refresh, which include a modernized logo and the tagline "Be All You Can Be." While this tagline is very popular amongst our veterans, it was not chosen for the sake of nostalgia; it was chosen because testing amongst our target audience and others revealed it to be the most favored and best suited for communicating the possibilities available with service in the Army and the purpose and passions of our potential recruits. This concept of possibilities addresses one of the highest barriers to entry of putting life on hold. Elements of this campaign are now in market and events like the Men's and Women's NCAA Basketball tournaments, with more planned this fiscal year.

#### TAKING CARE OF OUR PEOPLE

For the Army, "People First" means we develop and implement programs designed to keep our people safe and provide them with the quality of life they deserve. It also means we foster positive command and organizational climates and culture which enables the formation of cohesive teams. Positive climate and culture, plus cohesive teams, reduce harmful behaviors, and allows our men and women to focus on training to achieve their assigned missions. This equation achieves readiness.

#### *Quality of Life*

Investments in our people are directly correlated to the quality of life that we provide for them. Quality of life remains a cornerstone of the Army's People Strategy. These programs support and enhance readiness, recruitment, and retention by providing a positive experience for soldiers and families, including, well-maintained barracks and housing; quality, affordable childcare, and youth services programs; and meaningful employment and educational opportunities for spouses.

#### *Barracks and Housing*

Improving barracks and housing for our soldiers and families is a top priority for all Army senior leaders. The Tenant Bill of Rights helps us rebuild trust, ensure a positive living experience for military members and their families and increase their negotiating power with the Military Housing Privatization Initiative companies. We have fully implemented all 18 tenant rights at our 44 Army installations with privatized housing. We are committed to improving through the annual Tenant Satisfaction Surveys, which have enhanced our communication with residents, helped us create and prioritize action plans, and corrected deficiencies. We are improving other systems and processes including completing third-party inspections of

privatized family homes; implementing a Housing Environmental Hazard Response Registry for those living in privatized or government-owned/leased housing; hiring engineer technicians to provide quality assurance and implementing a Housing Certificate Program to build a skilled workforce.

#### *Childcare*

Childcare is a readiness issue. Our soldiers and their families must have peace of mind as they start and end the day in service to our Nation. We appreciate Congress funding seven of the Army's priority childcare centers in beginning in fiscal year 2021 (Hawai'i and Alaska), then again in fiscal year 2022 (Kansas and Kentucky) and recently in fiscal year 2023 (Georgia and Louisiana). These investments were crucial in bringing down the wait-list times for our families. We are also making significant investment in facilities sustainment, restoration, and modernization to ensure that child development centers are free of hazards and maintain continuity of service. To recruit and retain quality staff, we increased the salary of entry-level direct care staff; instituted recruitment bonuses; reduced childcare staff fees; and authorized commissary access for staff at 17 pilot locations. We also increased the provider rate cap for families who use community-based childcare when installation care is not available and applied the same concept to on-post family childcare (FCC) providers to increase the number of FCC homes.

#### *Spouse Employment and Educational Opportunities*

With frequent relocations and soldier deployments, Army spouses face distinct challenges in gaining and retaining employment compared to their civilian counterparts. We continue to reimburse up to \$1,000 for professional licensing and certification in a new State after a Permanent Change of Station move. We appreciate Congress' action taken in the fiscal year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act to extend the authority for reimbursement. More than 617 reimbursements have been paid since the inception of the program in May 2019, totaling more than \$272,000. We continually promote the Office of the Secretary of Defense Spouse Education and Career Opportunities Program's My Career Advancement Account scholarship program. The program provides eligible spouses with up to \$4,000 to pursue a license, certification or associate degree in any career field to attain the education, certifications, or licenses they need to find employment. Finally, we are investing in the Employment Readiness Program to help spouses find and maintain employment by hiring additional staff across Army installations.

### REDUCING HARMFUL BEHAVIORS

Our leaders are the first line of defense to combat harmful behaviors and care for our soldiers in our formations. Nothing corrodes team cohesion and reduces its effectiveness faster and more completely than the scourges of sexual harassment and sexual assault, prohibited discrimination, harassment, hazing, bullying, domestic violence, or suicide. The Army is focused not only on responding to these harmful events and providing care and support to victims, but also preventing them. To do this, we rely on leaders at all levels to create and sustain healthy command climates.

#### *Prevention*

The Integrated Prevention Advisory Group (I-PAG) is a dedicated capability for Senior Commanders designed to implement and evaluate evidence-based primary prevention activities across the individual, relationship, organizational, community, and societal levels. The I-PAG consists of individuals with specialized training and experience focused on engaging the community; empowering leaders with data and research; implementing comprehensive, community-based integrated prevention activities; and sustaining progress over time. These individuals are responsible for assessing holistic data sets, evaluating local policies, planning multiple reinforcing prevention activities, and evaluating outcomes. The I-PAG will provide the technical expertise necessary to connect the science of prevention and the art of command within an optimized prevention system.

#### *Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program (SHARP)*

The harmful behaviors of sexual assault and sexual harassment are detrimental to readiness and have no place in our Army. The Army continues to take action to reduce harmful behaviors within its ranks, with an emphasis on integrated prevention to produce demonstrated results.

Through the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) program, the Army is committed to enhancing readiness by preventing sexual harass-

ment, sexual assault, and associated retaliatory behaviors and providing comprehensive victim advocacy and response capabilities when such incidents occur.

All 70 of the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee (FHIRC) recommendations have been addressed, and of these, 56 recommendations have been implemented Army-wide. An additional 10 recommendations have been transferred in support of the Department of Defense's (DoD) deliberate and phased implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military (IRC) as approved of the Secretary of Defense, and four have been superseded by IRC recommendations. We have modified our policies, making it mandatory for commanders to initiate separation proceedings for any soldier with a substantiated complaint of sexual harassment. The Army is also adding 348 full-time SHARP professionals trained and experienced to support victims effectively.

#### *Suicide Prevention Program*

Taking care of our people is about building soldiers whose commitment to duty is underpinned by strong family relationships, peer support and leadership teams. Suicides affect unit cohesion and readiness and have no place in our Army. We must find ways to prevent harmful behaviors instead of responding to them after they occur. Individual soldiers, units and installations are all unique, with their own challenges. Suicide prevention programs are, therefore, not one-size-fits-all. We are working to pair the right resources for the right issue to support our soldiers and their families best.

We resolutely continue our efforts to: enhance leader engagement; strengthen individual, unit, and community resilience and connectedness; and mitigate stressors that may lead someone to suicide. This comprehensive approach focuses on the integration of a variety of primary prevention and intervention strategies and activities.

### PERSONNEL MODERNIZATION

The foundation of Army Readiness is personnel readiness. Programs, policies, innovations, and management models are transforming the Army's manpower and personnel systems to meet future needs. These changes will give our soldiers and civilians more opportunities to excel; give our Army the enduring advantage of a transparent, data-rich personnel environment; and improve our ability to compete for and retain talent.

#### *Talent Management*

The Army must prioritize managing its talent by capturing its soldiers' critical talent data (Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviors), balanced with the needs of the Army, which is at risk of losing its overmatch capabilities to potential adversaries.

The Command Assessment Program (CAP) improves the Army's ability to select the best leaders at the battalion and brigade levels. In November 2022, the Army completed the fourth iteration of CAP. Over the past 3 years, over 5,000 leaders at lieutenant colonel, colonel, GS-14, GS-15, and E-9 levels have assessed through this program. To date, CAP has screened out 168 leaders who would have been selected using only the pre-2020 system. When compared to the legacy Centralized Selection List system, CAP assesses and identifies leaders who are more cognitively capable, better written, and verbal communicators, more physically fit, more self-aware, and less likely to exhibit counterproductive or ineffective leadership traits. The DOD IRC recognized CAP as a promising practice for identifying leaders who are committed to the well-being of those under their command, and screening for leaders who do not show similar commitment.

The Army Talent Alignment Process (ATAP) is a decentralized, regulated market-style hiring system that aligns officers with jobs based on preferences shaped by the unique knowledge, skills, and behaviors of each officer, and the talents desired by commanders for their available positions. To date, 60,000 officers and warrant officers have been assigned using the Talent Marketplace. During the most recent marketplace cycle (fiscal year 2023) with reportable data, 69 percent of officers participating in the market obtained a Top 3 preference while 80 percent of officers obtained a Top 10 preference. Talent markets also enable the Army to experiment with monetary and non-monetary incentives to fill critical positions and retain talent. Monetary incentives have included Selective Retention Bonuses, Assignment Incentive Pay, and Special Duty Assignment Pay so the Army remains highly competitive with other governmental agencies and private industry. Non-monetary incentives such as advanced specialty training, stabilization, credentialing, and broadening assignments are also available.

Similar to ATAP, we have begun to implement the Assignment Satisfaction Key-Enlisted Module (ASK-EM) to support Active-Duty Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs) being considered for Staff Sergeant through Master Sergeant (MSG) assign-

ments. On average, 7,000 to 9,000 NCOs participate in the market each cycle with approximately 30,000 NCOs receiving their assignments through this process each year. Unlike Assignment Incentive Marketplace 2.0, ASK-EM does not allow the unit to preference NCOs. In conjunction with Human Resources Command, we are working to implement a two-sided market for the MSG population through the Integrated Personnel and Pay System—Army (IPPS-A) platform. A pilot of this capability is expected by the end of fiscal year 2023.

*The Integrated Personnel and Pay System—Army (IPPS-A)*

IPPS-A is the critical enabler for The Army People Strategy. IPPS-A is embracing emerging technologies, integrating modern personnel management and data analytics capabilities, and aligning with the Army's efforts to build a more effective and efficient force. It delivers the Total Force a secure, comprehensive, and data-rich human resource (HR) talent management system.

IPPS-A automates H.R. processes and interfaces with 200+ legacy H.R. and Pay systems. With the deployment of Release 3, 12 of these systems are sunseting while an additional 11 are partially subsumed. Upon full implementation, IPPS-A will fully subsume 32 legacy systems. What began nearly 3 years ago when the ARNG became the first component to implement IPPS-A is complete with the deployment of Release 3. All three components are executing personnel, limited pay, and basic talent management functions in IPPS-A seamlessly across the Total Force.

Work will continue to expand IPPS-A functionality and add additional capability through a series of improvements out 2030 and beyond. Our H.R. information technology modernization efforts support the talent management system we are designing to recruit better, retain, and reward the very best personnel essential to sustaining the all-volunteer Force. IPPS-A will integrate the new Army global payroll system, providing a congressionally mandated fiscal audit capability and improved talent management functionality.

CONCLUSION

The men and women in our United States Army serving our Nation, both in and out of uniform, along with their families, are our strength and legacy. Their talents, courage, and commitment make our Army the greatest in the world. To keep our Army strong, we must build our Force with individuals who embody the best of America, and offer them opportunities that allow their careers and families to flourish. A diverse, talented, strong, healthy, and resilient force is the most important indicator of our readiness.

Thank you for your generous and unwavering support of our outstanding soldiers, civilians, and their families.

Senator WARREN. Thank you very much. Secretary Parker, representing the Navy.

Senator SCOTT. Go Navy.

Senator WARREN. That Navy—stop that.

[Laughter.]

Senator WARREN. I just want to point out, my brothers, Air Force, Army, so. We are trying to do the best we can—[technical problems.] Secretary Parker.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE FRANKLIN R. PARKER, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY FOR MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS**

Mr. PARKER. Thank you. Chairwoman Warren, Ranking Member Scott, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to join you here today. I am honored by this opportunity to appear before you to talk about our Department of the Navy, sailors, marines, civilians, and their families.

As the 2022 National Security Strategy makes clear, we face unpredictable threats and global challenges. Our Nation needs a strong, well-trained, well-equipped Navy and Marine Corps to address the wide array of challenges and threats, and we must lever-

age our talent to retain both our competitive edge and our multi-domain dominance.

The changing strategic landscape demands we maintain and strengthen our Nation's maritime dominance so our forces can deter, fight, and win against potential adversaries. As an integrated team demonstrating talent, capabilities, and dedication second to none, together, our sailors, marines, and civilians can overcome any challenges they face.

Our people are our greatest strength and the core to our success, both as a military and as a Nation. I am incredibly proud of their performance, commitment, and unparalleled resilience in the face of the dynamic global challenges that have become our present operating environment.

Our Nation needs a strong, well-trained, well-equipped Navy and Marine Corps to address the wide array of challenges and threats facing our Nation. To be a combat ready force, we must leverage the strengths of all our people.

Further, because we have an All-Volunteer Force, we must ensure that also means our society see value in serving and are treated with respect when doing so. In our constantly evolving environment, we must continue to invest in mechanisms that ensure the services are positioned to meet their recruitment goals. However, we do have some challenges.

The general decrease in propensity to serve and several years of the COVID-19 pandemic limited both student attendance and recruiter access to schools, making it difficult for our recruiters to make and maintain contact with potential recruits.

The Secretary of the Navy is personally involved in addressing these challenges. As part of these efforts, we have engaged with leadership from the Department of Education for support with school access.

We also contact the principals that have restricted recruiters access to their schools. Through these and other efforts, we seek to ensure our services have what they need to meet their recruiting goals. In addition to recruiting, the Navy and Marine Corps team remains committed to retaining the right talent and experience, which also complements our recruiting efforts.

We will explore every lever within our authority to maximize retention, and we are already seeing positive trends in retention rates across both services. Over the course of the last year, the Department of the Navy has made significant strides to assess how education is delivered to the force and modernize our educational objectives.

Today's Navy and Marine Corps team is one of the most technologically advanced ever conceived, able to dominate in the air, sea, and undersea. As we become a more technologically advanced force, education will be a crucial warfighting enabler.

Through our naval university system, we are creating a continuum of learning that develops leaders to serve at every level and equips them with skills to maintain and operate increasingly complex systems in an ever-changing warfighting environment.

We are well aware of the fundamental link between mental health resiliency and the readiness of our force. To that end, we are committed to supporting and ensuring the mental health, safety,

and well-being of all sailors, marines, and Department of Navy civilians. Suicide is a national issue to which the military services are not immune.

Given the complexity of this challenge, our Office of Force Resiliency has taken a comprehensive approach to holistic, data driven suicide prevention efforts that harmonize with the defense strategy for suicide prevention.

We have also taken note of the recently released report from the Suicide Prevention Response Independent Review Committee and will work within the DOD's coordination framework to implement key recommendations. The Department of the Navy is committed to eliminating sexual assault within the Navy and Marine Corps at every level.

In addition to the toll brought on individual victims, sexual assault directly impacts our cohesion, our unit cohesion, and ultimately undercuts our readiness. Sexual assault is a persistent challenge that requires a multi-pronged approach that leverages a wide range of initiatives, not only to address sexual assault but also to prevent it before it occurs.

Secretary Del Toro directed the establishment of an implementation advisory panel last spring, bringing the leaders of all Department of Navy principal officers to the table to implement the recommendations of the Secretary of Defense's Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault.

Through this effort, the Department of the Navy has made significant strides to implement the IRC recommendations, though we fully recognize additional work remains. Further, to those efforts, we are investing significant resources to fuel the necessary changes, and we have made substantial progress in standing up a dedicated workforce to prevent harmful behaviors, professionalized the response to sexual assault, and best support survivor recovery.

Quality of life issues are critical to our servicemembers and their families. The stresses on our spouses and children weigh on the minds of our servicemembers, especially when they are deployed. By caring for our families, we enable our servicemembers to continue their focus on the warfighting mission.

To this end, we have taken action to implement increases in parental leave, support spousal licensing and career advancement, and expand dependent care support in early childhood access.

Additionally, we are pushing to end food insecurity among our most junior sailors and Marines through access to financial literacy tools and other forms of support. Regardless of the challenge, the Department of the Navy, sailors, marines, and civilians consistently answer the call. They step forward and perform superbly in our country's times of greatest need.

Time and again, our Navy and Marine Corps team has invariably risen to meet all challenges and defend our Nation, bonded together by almost 250 years of tradition and an unwavering, deep seated sense of duty to our country.

I look forward to working with you to ensure our efforts meaningfully and effectively support the well-being of our sailors, marines, civilians, and their families, and that we always best position them to fulfill their vital roles for our Nation. Thank you for the

opportunity to be here today, and I stand ready to answer your questions.

[The prepared statement of The Honorable Franklin R. Parker follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE FRANKLIN R. PARKER

INTRODUCTION

Chairwoman Warren, Ranking Member Scott, and Distinguished Members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to join you here today. I am honored by this opportunity to appear before you to talk about our sailors, marines, (Active Duty and reservists) as well as their families and our Department of the Navy civilian workforce.

As the 2022 National Security Strategy and National Military make clear, today we face a wide range of threats and global challenges. Coupled with complex systems and advancing technology, our Nation needs a strong, well-trained, well-equipped Navy and Marine Corps. We must leverage our talent to retain our competitive edge and multi-domain dominance.

The changing strategic landscape demands we maintain and strengthen the Nation's maritime dominance, so our forces can deter, and prevail against potential adversaries. Our Navy/Marine Corps Team must foster a culture of warfighting excellence, while treating each other with dignity and respect. As an integrated team, collectively demonstrating talent, capabilities, and dedication second to none, our people can overcome any challenge they face.

Our workforce comprised of ... servicemembers and civilians ... are at the core of our success—both as a military and a nation. I am incredibly proud of their performance, commitment, and unparalleled resilience in the face of the dynamic global challenges that have become our present operating environment.

COVID-19

In January, the Secretary of Defense rescinded his direction that all servicemembers receive the COVID-19 vaccine, as directed by the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), Section 525. Like many in leadership, I am proud of the commitment shown by members of our team during the Department's years-long effort to reduce risk to the force and preserve combat effectiveness. Our sailors and marines received the vaccine, helping to reduce the threat of COVID-19 to the force, their families, and our country. Notwithstanding the rescission of the vaccine mandate, we remain committed to protecting the force from COVID-19 and other diseases and will continue encouraging our sailors, marines, and civilians to vaccinate against them. We also have standing procedures for bringing members, separated under the prior policy, back into service, ensuring that such sailors and marines who wish to return may re-apply.

RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

Right now, we enjoy a total force of unprecedented quality. Achieving maritime dominance demands an agile force of undisputed lethality, resiliency and capacity. In our new environment, we must continue to ensure the Services are positioned to meet their recruitment and end-strength goals. We have some challenges.

A general decrease in propensity to serve and several years of the COVID-19 pandemic limited both student attendance and recruiter access to schools, making it difficult for our recruiters to make and maintain contact with potential recruits. The Secretary of the Navy is personally involved in addressing those challenges and we are working with both internal and external partners to foster success. As part of that effort we have reached out to the highest levels of the Department of Education, seeking to address school access issues, and have also reached out to the school principals who restricted recruiter access. Through these and other efforts, we seek to ensure our Services have what they need to meet recruiting goals and achieve force readiness.

While a picture of the current recruiting environment is complicated, the Navy and Marine Corps are actively committed to overcoming recruiting challenges through strong collaboration and innovative thought. In addition to recruiting, the Navy/Marine Corps Team remains committed to retaining the right talent and experience. This complements our efforts with recruiting. We will explore every lever within our authority to maximize retention and we already are seeing positive trends in retention rates across both services.

## EDUCATION

Over the course of the last year, the Department of the Navy has made significant strides to assess how education is delivered to the force, and modernize our educational objectives. Today's Navy and Marine Corps Team is a forward deployed, highly sophisticated network, one of the most technologically advanced networks ever conceived, and one that operates either in concert with other combat units or fully self-sustained, able to dominate the air, sea, and undersea. This network has but one purpose—to focus the capability of the American sailor and marine, assisted by technology, to serve the national interests of the United States and her allies and partners across the spectrum of engagement, whether for humanitarian purposes, to maintain freedoms in the global commons, or in combat.

As we become a more technologically advanced force, education will be a crucial warfighting enabler to maintaining America's might upon the sea. Our naval education enterprise is working together to develop leaders with warfighting knowledge, intellectual dynamism, and creativity to maintain a strategic advantage against competitors and global adversaries. Through our Naval University system, we are creating a continuum of learning that develops such leaders to serve at every level and equips them with skills to maintain and operate increasingly complex systems in an ever-changing warfighting environment.

## RESILIENCY &amp; READINESS

Mental health concerns and rising suicide rates are national issues to which the Services have not been immune. We are well aware of the inextricable link between mental health, resiliency and the readiness of our force. To that end, we are committed to supporting and ensuring the mental health, safety, and well-being of all sailors, marines, and Department of the Navy civilians. We must do everything we can to foster the well-being of our people and prevent suicide. No one solution applies to every sailor, marine, or civilian.

Given the complexity of this challenge, our Office of Force Resiliency has taken a comprehensive approach to enhance holistic, data-driven suicide prevention efforts that draw from and harmonize with the Defense Strategy for Suicide Prevention. We have also taken note of the recently released report from the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee (SPRIRC), and will work within DOD's coordination framework to implement key recommendations that will further our prevention effort.

The Department of the Navy (DON) is laser focused on countering sexual assault within the Navy and Marine Corps at every level. In addition to the toll on victim, sexual assault directly impacts unit cohesion and ultimately undercuts our readiness. We must maintain environments that foster respect, strengthen the dignity of military service, and increase our warfighting readiness. Sexual assault is a persistent challenge that requires a multi-pronged approach leveraging a wide range of initiatives, not only to address sexual assault, but also to prevent it before it occurs.

Secretary Del Toro directed the establishment of an Implementation Advisory Panel (IAP) for the Department of the Navy last spring, bringing the leaders of all principal offices to the table to pinpoint strategies for the Navy and Marine Corps to implement the recommendations of the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military (IRC), as approved by the Secretary of Defense. Through the IAP, the DON has already made significant strides to implement the IRC recommendations, focusing first on the highest priority efforts. We fully recognize that we need to continue to confront and prevent these destructive behaviors. We are investing significant resources to fuel the needed changes and we have made substantial progress in standing up a dedicated prevention workforce, professionalizing the sexual assault response workforce to better provide victim care and support, and establishing Offices of Special Trial Counsel.

Additionally, our Office of Force Resiliency actively synchronizes the DON's sexual assault awareness and training, prevention, victim response, and accountability initiatives with the DOD Office of Force Resiliency. Sexual assault is more than just a crime. It undermines the trust and commitment that is foundational to our forces and erodes faith in our leaders, institutions, shipmates, and marines. This is a leadership issue, and you have my commitment to clearly and actively support these efforts and to demonstrate that sexual assault and sexual harassment will not be tolerated in any way, shape, or form.

Our Nation needs a strong, well-trained, and well-equipped Navy and Marine Corps to address the wide array of challenges and threats facing our Nation. To be a combat-ready force, we must leverage the strengths of all our people. Further, be-

cause we are an all-volunteer force, we must ensure that all segments of our society see value in serving and are treated with dignity and respect when doing so.

As Secretary Del Toro stated in his posture testimony last year, “We draw talent from all of America to building our warfighting advantage. We need a diverse force, so every child in America can see themselves wearing the uniform or working in our civilian ranks tomorrow, and every viewpoint is represented in our operations today.”

Thanks to the leadership of Secretary Del Toro, Admiral Gilday and General Berger, our force is more potent today because we do just that—we draw from all of America. Yet, there is still more work to be done.

All Americans qualified to serve in the Navy and Marine Corps should have the opportunity to serve if they can meet the appropriate standards. Anything less would not allow the Navy and Marine Corps to avail ourselves of the best possible talent in America, and would render us less fit as a total force.

We are working to reduce barrier to accession, promotion, and retention, in recognition of the value of the service rendered by all of our sailors, marines, and civilians.

#### SUPPORT FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Quality of life issues are critical to our servicemembers and their families. The stresses on our spouses and children weigh on the minds of our servicemembers, especially when they are deployed. By caring for our families, we enable our servicemembers to continue their focus on the warfighting mission.

In January, the Department of the Navy implemented increases in the entitlement to parental leave as required by NDAA. Such measures not only are the right thing to do for our sailors and marines, but they also are crucial for recruitment and retention by providing necessary flexibilities for families to care for their children.

In addition, last fall, the Department of Defense directed services to make Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves easier, strengthen support to our military families, expand spousal employment, and ensure affordable basic needs. We have since taken action to support spousal licensing and career advancement, expanding dependent care support and early childhood access. Additionally, we are pushing to end food insecurity among our youngest Sailors and Marines through access to financial literacy tools, spousal employment programs and other forms of support.

#### CONCLUSION

Regardless of the challenge, The Department of the Navy’s sailors, marines, and civilians consistently answer the call. They step forward, raise their right hand, and perform superbly in our country’s times of greatest need. Our Navy and Marine Corps Team has invariably risen to the meet all challenges and defend our Nation, bonded together by almost 250 years of tradition and an unwavering, deep-seeded sense of duty to our country.

I look forward to working with you to ensure our efforts meaningfully and effectively support the well-being of our sailors, marines, civilians, and their families and that we always best position them to fulfill their vital roles in support of our national security interests. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today, and I stand ready to answer your questions.

Senator WARREN. Thank you. Thank you, Secretary Parker. Secretary Wagner, representing the Air Force.

#### **STATEMENT OF ALEX WAGNER, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE FOR MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS**

Mr. WAGNER. Chairman Warren, Ranking Member Scott, Distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and thank you for your continued support for our airmen, our guardians, and their families.

I am looking forward to working with both of you and continue the work with your terrific staff. I am proud not only of the adaptability, but also the tenacity of our force as current world events such as pandemic recovery, inflation, and a return to great power competition pose ever evolving challenges for our Nation.

In order to recruit and retain a lethal, expert, and resilient force, the DAF [Department of the Air Force] needs our partners on the Hill to help us tell our story to the American people, and showcase both the unique missions of military service, but also the unique value of military life.

We are implementing the vision of the Secretary of Defense outlined in his Taking Care of People Initiative but have also gone further in important areas like childcare and spouse unemployment.

Our members need to know that we are doing everything we can to take care of and support their loved ones. That also means providing a competitive compensation package, housing, and education benefits, and quality health care.

I believe we have made progress in this respect as validated by our 90 percent retention rate, but I acknowledge we must do more to promote resilience and prevent those harmful behaviors that are counter to our values, undermine our team, and diminish our readiness.

In particular, sexual violence will not be tolerated, condoned, or ignored within our ranks, and those that breach that trust will be held accountable. Finally, I want to talk about the recruiting challenge that the DAF and the other services have been facing.

The Air Force is currently projected to miss its enlisted Active component recruiting goals for the first time since 1999. There are multiple factors that have made recruiting challenging, including historically low unemployment, strong private sector wage growth, and a lack of access to high schools exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the most important factor, propensity to serve, is the lowest we have seen in decades. But what does that really mean? It starts with a lack of familiarity. Secretary Cisneros said in an earlier panel, in 1995, 40 percent of Americans had a parent who served. But today, that number is less than 13 percent.

After 9/11, military installations became more hardened and more secure, but it also further separated those who serve from those whom they protect. That lack of familiarity has been filled in by a public narrative that emphasizes the risks of service while missing the benefits.

The DAF is taking steps to address this issue by opening up opportunities for communities to visit our bases, sharing inspiring and authentic stories of servicemembers, and highlighting the stakes of our high-tech mission to deter near-peer competitors. But the Department can't do this alone, and we need your help.

Congress has a critical oversight function of the military, but we also need to enhance our partnership to increase propensity to serve. You are an important voice to your constituents, to the young people, to the parents, and to the influencers that can help shape the next generation of service by elevating opportunities and highlighting the benefits of our values and our team.

Now, 50 years into an All-Volunteer Force, we must be able to reach all communities of America, geographic and demographic, to ensure we recruit the brightest and the best. You can't be it if you can't see it.

Every person in America's Air and Space Forces play a critical role in ensuring that this organization is prepared to meet the

challenges of today and tomorrow, and in particular, our pacing challenge.

We are excited to partner with you and to rebuild this relationship with the American people together. With that, I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of The Honorable Alex Wagner follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE ALEX WAGNER

INTRODUCTION

Chairwoman Warren, Ranking Member Scott, Distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for your continued support of our airmen, guardians, and their families. A cornerstone of the National Defense Strategy is building a resilient joint force. Since the beginning of this administration, the Secretary of Defense has prioritized taking care of the people of the Department of Defense: those who wear the uniform, the civilians who support them, and the dependents who rely on them. The human capital portfolio is integral to this strategic priority, and it is reflected in the Department of Defense's Fiscal Year 2024 budget request. I am proud of not only the adaptability, but the tenacity of our force as current world events such as pandemic recovery, inflation, and a return to great power competition pose ever evolving challenges to our Nation.

The Department of the Air Force (DAF) is not just a collection of aircraft, munitions, and computers. The platforms are animated by a highly skilled, cohesive, and expertly trained group of individuals who work together as a team—within our force, across the military services, and with allies and partners—toward a common goal. Our people are the backbone of the Department's readiness, and their contributions are fundamental to the success of the mission. From pilots and mechanics to intelligence analysts, medics, and security forces, every person in America's Air and Space Forces plays a critical role in ensuring that the organization is prepared to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow—and in particular, our pacing challenge, the People's Republic of China (PRC). As the PRC seeks to increasingly compete with us in the air and space domains, maintaining our competitive edge requires that we fully leverage the talents, diversity, creativity of the DAF's Total Force. I am confident that the quality of our people is critical to deterring aggression; but if deterrence fails, they are essential to providing a decisive edge in denial and defeat of our competitors.

EMPOWERING AIRMEN AND GUARDIANS

*End Strength*

*Air Force.* The United States Air Force's end strength is tied to specific weapons systems and our ability to rapidly transition to a wartime posture against a peer competitor. Our Total Force end strength target of about 503,000 reflects the critical balance of readiness, modernization, and the ability to resource future capabilities to compete and win in the high-end fight.

This requires the Air Force to divest legacy force structure to fund modernization for the capabilities the Air Force needs in 2030 and beyond. Our military end strength reductions in fiscal year 2024 are commensurate with proposed force structure and divestitures. The fiscal year 2024 end strength reduction is 1,044 Total Air Force Airmen.

Reductions were taken in multiple weapons systems to include Airborne Warning and Control System E-3, A-10, Joint Surveillance and Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS), C-130, F-15, F-16, and Tactical Air Control Parties. Moving away from these platforms and missions redirects manpower to our newest aircraft, such as the B-21, E-11, and F15-EX, many of which require both experienced maintainers and pilots to assure our competitive edge.

*Space Force.* As we all know, space is increasingly contested, congested, and competitive. Securing space is getting harder, driving the need to increase inventory of space-focused military and civilian personnel beyond what was previously required. Military end strength growth of 800 in fiscal year 2024 is a result of intra- and inter-service transfers from the Air Force and Army.

The Space Force's 9,400 guardians will support integrated deterrence required by the National Defense Strategy, and ensure our total workforce possesses the competencies to address the actions of our adversaries.

We thank you for your continued favorable congressional support of the Fiscal Year 2024 President's Budget request to ensure the Air Force and Space Force

can access the talent we need to compete in a world defined by ambiguity, rapid change, and near peer competition.

#### *Recruiting Talent*

The DAF is acutely aware of the requirements of our technologically dependent force and the challenges of competing for top talent, particularly given historically low unemployment. As a result, we anticipate a challenging recruiting environment moving forward. More concerning, the youth market is increasingly disconnected and unfamiliar with today's military, resulting in fewer youth interested in or planning to join the military. Today, 50 percent of youth have never considered serving in the Armed Forces. Additionally, 23 percent of 17- to 24-year-old men and women in the United States are eligible to serve in the military without a waiver, and only one in 11 have the propensity to serve. The Air Force is currently trending to miss goals across all three components: Regular Air Force by about 13 percent, over three thousand individuals, while the Air Guard and Reserve components are projected to miss their goals by even higher margins.

While the Space Force will meet its recruiting goal, we must be prepared if recruiting declines. We believe that the proposal for a Space Force single military personnel system offers a new model of service that will attract a broader range of candidates with essential skill sets. Additionally, the Space Force is investing in a "brand" recognition marketing campaign to increase awareness across the American public of this new service, its unique mission and the talent required to achieve it, and the impacts we have both to the Nations' defense and our modern way of life.

The DAF has a series of initiatives underway that I believe will tangibly impact our ability to recruit and meet near-term needs. This includes expanding the aperture of who can meet our high standards by addressing key areas that have led to disqualification from service such as tattoo locations and weight restrictions. Additionally, we revised our enlistment drug screening physicals to allow for a re-test if an enlistee tests positive for THC, which aligns with the increasing number of states legalizing marijuana use. We are also looking at increasing the recruiting force, modernizing the underlying technology systems they use, and creating a centralized e-recruiting cell to virtually recruit and increase national lead conversions. We are also expanding our influencer program to include airmen and guardian referral incentives for new recruits. We plan to meet new airmen where they are with our Directed Recruiting Assistance Program which brings recent recruits back to their hometowns to assist in outreach. Finally, we are also bolstering incentives, including initial enlistment bonuses to attract high quality talent needed to address peer competitor challenges.

Significant focus is also on increasing our national and local marketing efforts to create broader brand awareness. While we believe any short-term efforts will allow us to access a high-quality force consistent with our standards, our long-term challenge requires us to grow rather than stifle propensity to serve.

#### *Talent Management*

The DAF is aggressively defining future competencies and skills required for 2030 and beyond with force management that can adapt to an evolving and uncertain future. This demands digitally savvy and multi-capable airmen and guardians. The DAF is moving to evolve talent management processes and systems that create a competitive advantage in shaping, developing, and employing the future force we need.

Modernizing talent management processes and systems is critical to increasing agility, flexibility, and data access needed to meet future force structure and skill requirements. To do this, the DAF is undertaking a five-to-seven-year overhaul to update talent management architecture. We are replacing 111 H.R. IT systems, moving into six modern platforms. These new systems will enable us to make data driven talent management decisions while significantly reducing administrative burden.

The Air Force is committed to transforming how we develop, promote, and retain our force to execute the National Defense Strategy. Our work centers on two distinct lines of effort to prepare for the high-end fight. First, we are aggressively defining future competencies and skills required for 2030 and beyond. These include an increased focus on digital and Multi-Capable Airmen. Second, we are modernizing talent management processes and systems to create a competitive advantage in shaping, developing, and employing the future force.

One example of how the Air Force is modernizing talent management processes includes our recently launched new performance evaluation system and transition to how we evaluate airmen, using the Airman Leadership Qualities. The new performance evaluation process sets clear expectations about what we value as a Serv-

ice, measures how an airman's performance and behaviors embody those values and incentivize them to continue their development through meaningful feedback.

Additionally, the DAF implemented a dual track "Civilians We Need" career model that recognizes the need for both functional experts and enterprise leaders in our civilian corps. This model allows our civilian airmen and guardians to plan their job experiences, education, training, and leadership opportunities to meet their professional goals. This dual-track civilian career model also offers greater diversity benefits while and enhancing retention.

#### SUPPORTING READINESS

##### *Taking Care of People*

While our servicemembers are compensated competitively, the unique complications of military life, like frequent moves and unanticipated expenses demand an ever-vigilant focus on expanding initiatives that enhance and increase stability for servicemembers and their families. Thanks to the support of Congress, the DAF offers each of our servicemembers a competitive compensation package. We are grateful for the recent increases in Basic Pay, Basic Allowance for Housing, and Basic Allowance for Subsistence that constitute the core of our members compensation. The DAF acknowledges the current economic environment poses a challenge to our airmen, guardians, and their dependents, particularly as inflation and the associated housing and rental markets increased. Economic conditions were also exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We know that to build a resilient force, we must provide our servicemembers and their families stability with reliable access to safe, affordable housing and appropriate tools to ensure financial readiness. As a result, we are committed to providing additional support to families through a comprehensive network of resources focused on financial literacy education, improving military spouse employment, and expanding access to quality and affordable childcare on and off the installation. We further sought to enhance economic security by expediting Temporary Lodging Expense extension requests, promoting the DOD's Military Leader's Economic Security Toolkit, and implementing the Basic Needs Allowance.

We knew the stressors of moving can reduce a sense of financial stability, particularly when unexpected expenses are incurred. As a result, the DAF has sought to increase geographic stability for servicemembers and their families by implementing 36-month tour lengths for Unaccompanied First Permanent Assignments in certain overseas locations. Currently, 76,821 airmen and guardians have more than 36-months' time-on-station; of those the vast majority, 68,578, are CONUS.

The DAF has also created a Food Service Working Group to review all our dining facilities consistent with the Office of the Secretary of Defense's Strategy and Roadmap to Strengthen Food Security Within the Force. Today, our members are saving money at the register, with cost of goods in commissaries on average 25 percent lower than at local marketplaces. Our future efforts to increase access to healthy food center on four key pillars: expanding dining facility hours, enhanced access to healthy options, effectiveness of the meal card program, and the insights into the installation-wide food landscape. These insights will shape the multiple lines of effort the DAF will undertake in 2023 to improve access to healthy food options across the DAF enterprise.

##### *Child Care*

Accessible, affordable, and high-quality childcare is a critical enabler of the Department's mission. This is a readiness issue, as our airmen and guardians rely on us to focus on the mission while knowing their youngest family members are being cared for at our Child Development Centers (CDCs). I believe that the DAF's Child and Youth Programs are the gold standard and as a result, they are in high demand. Currently, the DAF has 15,828 children enrolled in military child development centers across 74 installations and 1,682 children enrolled in 381 Family Child Care (FCC) homes (2,286 spaces) at 57 locations. As of 1 January 2023, 4,630 children have not been placed in an installation CDC/FCC program on the date care was needed with an average wait time of 143 days.

Those numbers are not acceptable, and here is what we are doing about it. The DAF's fiscal year 2024 budget seeks to improve access to, and reduce wait lists for, childcare includes leveraging staffing initiatives, adding FCC providers, increasing community-based fee assistance, and targeted construction investments.

The DAF has employed various incentives to recruit and retain our CDC providers. We are leveraging new direct hiring authorities, while executing \$2 million in incentive bonuses for sign-on, employee referrals, meeting training targets, and longevity. We continue to implement the \$15 per hour minimum rate and increased

compensation to remain competitive with employers outside the gate. With these efforts, we saw staffing level increased through 2022 Permanent Change of Station (PCS) season from 65 percent on July 1, 2022 to 72 percent on October 1, 2022.

Recently, the Secretary of Defense instructed military departments to provide a minimum 50 percent childcare fee discount for the first child direct care of providers in our CDCs. Recognizing that this incentive could substantially help with staffing shortages, the DAF went further and directed additional policy changes to include a 100 percent discount for direct care staff and established new discounts for the additional children of those providers as well as other personnel within the Child Development Program.

So far, the results are promising: 23 percent of providers have children and are receiving childcare fee discounts. The incentive is attractive to applicants with children who may not have otherwise applied. Preliminary data suggest that DAF direct care staffing levels have increased since implementing the enhanced discount. We continue to look at compensation and incentives to recruit and retain direct care workers in highly competitive national childcare labor market.

While we improve our staffing, we continue to prioritize infrastructure requirements to support the childcare need. The Child and Youth Facility Master Plan identifies 31 new CDC requirements, nine are funded for construction, and 12 are funded for planning and design. In fiscal year 2024, we are expanding compensation for servicemembers during PCS moves to assist with childcare when services are not readily available upon arrival at new installation. The proposed budget also sets aside \$50 million in Facility Sustainment, Restoration, and Modernization (FSRM) funds for focused investment in CDCs. Additionally, installations receive discretionary sustainment funding for routine preventative maintenance and repair for facility projects with costs below the thresholds for centralized funding.

#### *Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)*

EFMP is a vital component of taking care of our DAF families. Navigating military and community resources during major life events can be challenging as a military family. EFMP is included in the DAF PCS process to ensure required specialty medical and/or educational care is available for dependents at the gaining duty location. This comprehensive, coordinated, multi-agency program is integral to serving our 36,000 servicemembers and 55,000 family members who are enrolled in EFMP across the DAF.

Over the last 2 years, the DAF has made significant improvements to EFMP, as required by the Fiscal Year 2021 NDAA, including centralization of DAF EFMP as well as leveraging technology and data to improve consistency of decisions. With the launch of an automated system and implementation of centralized medical screening, the DAF effectively removed the extensive administrative burden on our families. We have completed approximately 70 percent of the transformation and remain on track to complete these improvements.

To ensure we are doing everything to provide members with the necessary support and services their families need, the Air Force Audit Agency is currently evaluating the EFMP enterprise. Their report will include a full assessment of metrics being used to measure performance and satisfaction, remaining manning gaps, appropriate alignment of roles and responsibilities between the medical and personnel staff, and policy considerations for overall program efficiency and effectiveness.

#### *Resilience, Prevention, and Accountability*

Prevention and response efforts against harmful behaviors such as sexual assault, suicide, and domestic violence are critical to building a resilient force. We recognize that one servicemember experiencing any of these issues is one too many and overall, we need to do more to prevent and reduce these incidents that are counter to our values and undercut the lethality and efficacy of our force.

*Sexual Assault.* The Independent Review Commission (IRC) on Sexual Assault in the Military recommended improvements to accountability, prevention, culture and climate, and victim care and support. The DAF is on track to complete implementation of the recommendations as approved by the Secretary of Defense. We are increasing the response workforce, developing an independent reporting structure outside the chain of command for our Sexual Assault and Response Coordinators (SARCs) and enabling sexual harassment complainants to access victim advocacy support from a SARC or Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Victim Advocates. In accordance with the Fiscal Year 2022 NDAA, the DAF implemented the requirement for an independent Office of Special Trial Counsel, with exclusive prosecution authority over certain categories of UCMJ offenses, to include sexual assault and domestic violence committed on or after December 28, 2023. The DAF's Office of Special Trial Counsel reached initial operational capacity in June 2022 and

is poised to continue the effort to promote a culture which reduces instances of sexual assault and domestic violence by holding offenders accountable.

Additionally, we have implemented a Safe-to-Report policy that encourages victims to report sexual assault by withholding punishment for minor collateral misconduct related to the sexual assault incident or report, like underage drinking or fraternization. These improvements are aimed at empowering survivors and ensuring they receive critical support and care.

Last year, we launched an Integrated Response Co-Location Pilot Program where we tested a more holistic approach to responding and assisting survivors of sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, stalking and cyber harassment across seven CONUS/OCONUS installations. The 6-month pilot program centralized five key support service entities including SARC, SAPR Victim Advocate, Domestic Abuse Victim Advocate, Victims Counsel, and the Religious Support Team to simplify access and advocacy processes for Airmen and Guardians. We also comprehensively surveyed providers, commanders, and survivors to assess program benefits as well as areas for modification. Initial feedback demonstrated that co-locating response services increased support, access, and awareness for survivors. We intend to use this feedback to consider how and where to inform decisions on further co-location of these essential services.

*Suicide.* The DAF recognizes that suicide is a complex issue with no single cause or solution but is committed to reducing the numbers of suicides within our ranks. While we are making strides to increase help seeking behavior, one suicide is too many and we continue to enhance our prevention approach to align with empirically based best practices, including “warm hand-off” policies, time-based prevention campaigns, and encouraging lethal means safety measures.

As compared to DOD-wide trends, DAF Active Duty suicides showed the greatest reduction of all the Services since 2019; Active Duty suicides decreased by 38 percent over the period 2019–2021. Those who died by suicide were largely enlisted, male, and under the age of 30, across all three components, with firearms being the leading method of suicide.

On February 24th, the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee (SPRIRC) published its findings and recommendations. The SPRIRC report focuses on four main areas, including restructuring suicide prevention training, providing additional resources to help servicemembers access existing support services, promoting lethal means safety, and emphasizing leader stewardship in addressing servicemember needs.

The Secretary of Defense has reviewed the report from the Suicide Prevention & Response Independent Review Committee. The DAF will work diligently to ensure processes can continue to make progress toward meaningful, long-term reductions in Total Force suicides. We are positioned to develop plans to implement the recommendations he accepts.

*Domestic Violence.* While we have taken important steps to better support domestic violence survivors, we must do more to establish a foundation of trust, integrity, and respect that encourages reporting and engenders confidence in our enterprise.

Most recently, the Secretary of the Air Force directed a 90-day cross-functional review to comprehensively look at how we investigate and respond to domestic violence cases, increase survivor confidence in leadership, and enhance our survivor support capabilities. Specifically, this includes identification of leader actions that undermine trust and to better connect all of those involved or affected by domestic violence to services and support; and where an investigation does not result in criminal prosecution, identification, and analysis for the role of any available command administrative actions. This increased focus on improving the experiences of domestic violence survivors will also advance ongoing efforts to deliver better care and support across the range of multiple forms of interpersonal violence, including sexual assault and sexual harassment.

#### *A Ready Medical Force*

In conjunction with the Air Force Medical Readiness Agency and the Defense Health Agency, in July of last year the DAF launched a new medical profiling system with the goal of improving both communication and overall readiness. This system, called the Airman and Guardian Availability Management system creates a new way of generating a profile while remaining under the same management system. This program was tested at 14 locations for Active Duty personnel as well as seven Air National Guard and Reserve units. The idea is to empower servicemembers to be more engaged in their recovery.

The DAF's efforts to protect our servicemembers and their families at the onset of COVID-19 was carried out quite expeditiously while simultaneously executing our global mission. The DAF has acted and continues to act upon lawful guidance

from the Office of the Secretary of Defense in a timely manner. When Secretary Austin mandated immunization for servicemembers, the DAF acted swiftly to protect lives and to effectively execute our important mission. As a result of the quick DAF response, 99 percent of the Active and nearly 98 percent of the 500,000 total force Airmen and Guardians were vaccinated, ensuring they maintained their readiness while enabling their deployment to several states that were experiencing shortages in medical personnel. Our vaccination efforts saved of thousands of lives. What we know now about COVID is drastically different than what we knew in the spring of 2020.

On January 10th of this year, Secretary Austin rescinded his August 2021 memorandum mandating COVID-19 vaccination, consistent with legal requirements of the Fiscal Year 2023 NDAA. As a result, the Secretary of the Air Force formally rescinded all mandate-related requirements and in February provided clear guidance to the force regarding removal of adverse actions and handling of pending Religious Accommodation Requests related to refusal of COVID-19 vaccinations. I assure you that implementation of these processes will be efficient, transparent, and fair.

#### CONCLUSION

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the All-Volunteer Force, a cornerstone of our personnel policy. The commitment of our airmen, guardians, and their families is a testament to the success of dedicated, proud, and impactful Air and Space Forces, and we must continue to support and sustain it for the next fifty years and beyond. We look forward to continuing to partner with you.

Senator WARREN. Thank you. I am going to ask the first round of questions here. The Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps, or the JROTC, is a DOD funded program for middle school and high school students that is designed to teach students the value of citizenship and public service.

Schools hire and oversee the instructors, and then the military services that train and pay part of the salaries for the instructors who are all retired servicemembers. DOD and the Department of Education share oversight for the program, but there are some pretty serious gaps in that oversight.

A recent New York Times investigation found that at least 33 JROTC instructors have been criminally charged with sexual misconduct. I started my own investigation with Senators Blumenthal, Gillibrand, and Hirono in response to this alarming situation and found that there were at least 114 allegations of abuse over the past decade.

Now, when the services learned about these 114 cases, they did the right thing and suspended or fired the instructor. But I am worried that we are seeing only the tip of the iceberg.

Secretary Schaefer, the Army has the largest JROTC program of all the military services so let me start by asking you. One of the main ways that we track whether we are making progress on military sexual assault is an annual report. Is there any kind of formal annual reporting on instances of sexual assault and harassment in the JROTC program?

Dr. SCHAEFER. Senator Warren, thank you for your question. This is an issue that deeply concerns me as well. There is an annual—my understanding is there is an annual report, but it has not had that tracking in it, yet—

Senator WARREN. So, there is no—the annual report I am asking about, is there a report tracking the incidences of sexual assault?

Dr. SCHAEFER. So, yes, there is a report. It has not tracked sexual assault—

Senator WARREN. So, the answer is no.

Dr. SCHAEFER. To this point—yet my office has directed it. Before I came in, in December, my office directed that we include that in the report that already—

Senator WARREN. Okay, but right now there is not—you are now trying to put this in. Okay, that is good. It is a good thing. Another tool recommended by experts for tracking this type of problem is a survey that allows individuals to anonymously report instances of sexual harassment or abuse. Does the Army have that kind of survey for JROTC?

Dr. SCHAEFER. I am not aware of it, but I can look into it. I agree that that might be a good—

Senator WARREN. I think you will find the answer is no on that. So let me ask the other services. Annual report, Secretary Parker?

Mr. PARKER. Chairwoman Warren, no, there is no annual report.

Senator WARREN. No annual report. Secretary Wagner?

Mr. WAGNER. Chairwoman, there is an annual report. It is called the Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) for military folks and for DOD civilians. These are employees of schools, the JROTC instructors are school employees. The students are obviously students, and so, the optic of the military, asking a survey—

Senator WARREN. I am not asking you that. What I am asking is, do you have an annual report that records how many people reported sexual assault against your folks who were in the JROTC program?

Mr. WAGNER. The Air Force JROTC program office tracks this extremely closely—

Senator WARREN. So, you do—so if I request that annual report, you will get a copy of it and it will show me how many people reported incidences of sexual harassment or assault?

Mr. WAGNER. I can't say it is a formal report. What I can say is I have seen a list of every single incident and the disposition over the last 5 years.

Senator WARREN. So, the answer to my question about is there an annual report, is that a yes, or no?

Mr. WAGNER. We—as far as I am aware, we don't have an actual annual report.

Senator WARREN. All right, and do you do a survey? Secretary Parker.

Mr. PARKER. No, we do not do a survey.

Senator WARREN. Secretary Wagner.

Mr. WAGNER. Senator, we don't do a survey, but we do provide a number of mechanisms for either parents or students to report incidents.

Senator WARREN. If you are serious about sexual assault and sexual harassment, these are two best tools that we know we have available. I am asking the question, are the military services doing it? I am hearing from Secretary Schaefer that she is starting with the Army. I am not hearing it from the Navy.

I am not hearing it from the Air Force, and I am asking all three of you using the second tool, and that is surveys, and I am hearing the answer is no, no, and no. So, look, no annual reporting or just starting some annual reporting, no surveys.

In other words, there is no real way for the DOD or the services to have the kind of information they need to exercise basic oversight. You got to start with knowing what is going on. We know the problems with these service. We know that people under-report. We know they underreport formally.

We know they underreported surveys. But you have got to at least start there. You know, one of the biggest problems that has come to light in these investigations is also that some of the instructors who abuse these students had done it before.

For at least seven of the instructors that we know about who were eventually criminally charged, it turns out that students had already raised concerns with the school before the incident that got these instructors arrested.

So let me start there. Secretary Schaefer, if colleges fail to report public safety issues like sexual assault, the Department of Education can fine them under the Cleary Act or even strip them of all Federal funding. There are serious consequences for failure to report. So, let's ask about DOD accountability.

If schools fail to report or stop this behavior in JROTC programs, does DOD have any mechanism for saying you no longer get to operate a JROTC program?

Dr. SCHAEFER. My understanding is that it is the responsibility of the schools to report any of these instances—

Senator WARREN. I know, and I am asking when school falls down on that responsibility, if this were the Department of Education, the Department of Education actually has tools to use to say you are going to pay consequences if you fail to report. Because we all understand nobody wants to report this stuff.

The schools that are responsible certainly don't want to report this. So, I am asking, is there anything in the Army JROTC program that will tell a school, if you fail to report, there will be consequences?

Dr. SCHAEFER. Again, I am not aware of that, but I can look into it for you and give you—

Senator WARREN. Okay. I am going to take that as a no unless you tell me something different. Secretary Parker, how about the Navy?

Mr. PARKER. I am not aware that there is a specific trigger for—

Senator WARREN. I will take that as a no. Secretary Wagner.

Mr. WAGNER. Senator Warren, the memorandum of agreement between Air Force ROTC and each school has specific requirements—

Senator WARREN. I am not asking about the requirements. I am asking about whether there is consequence if the school just keeps its mouth shut.

Mr. WAGNER. If the school violates and consistently violates the memorandum of agreement, then the school would be decertified as would any—

Senator WARREN. Have you ever decertified a school?

Mr. WAGNER. I will have to look into that.

Senator WARREN. Okay. All right. But you say you actually have a mechanism.

Mr. WAGNER. We have a mechanism.

Senator WARREN. Okay. All right. So, we have got this on sexual assault. Very disturbing findings, and sexual harassment. There is one other thing I want to cover very quickly, and that is recent investigations have also found that dozens of schools have forced students to participate in the JROTC program against their will.

Parents have to sign a permission slip for a kid to go to the museum on a field trip. The notion that thousands of students are forced to participate in JROTC programs is just out of line with the program's values.

Secretary Schaefer, would the Army support requiring JROTC programs to certify that their units are made up only of students who have provided informed consent to participate?

Dr. SCHAEFER. Well, we certainly don't condone forced enforcement of this, and that may be an opportunity to look into—

Senator WARREN. So, you would like to see—so perhaps a way to certify that that is the case?

Dr. SCHAEFER. Perhaps, yes.

Senator WARREN. Secretary Parker, how would the Navy feel about that?

Mr. PARKER. Senator Warren, I believe that is something that we would be willing to consider.

Senator WARREN. Okay, and Secretary Wagner.

Mr. WAGNER. Absolutely.

Senator WARREN. Okay. Well, we have an All-Volunteer Force. We should have an All-Volunteer JROTC. I think we should all be able to agree on that. You know, if the military doesn't step up and prevent these kinds of abuses, then you endanger our ability to continue programs that build our force for the future.

This is your reputation on the line here, and I hope you will work with me to get some procedures in place to make this program a safe program for all of our kids. Thank you.

Senator SCOTT. Ranking Member Scott.

Thank you. Secretary Wagner, first off, thanks for being here. One thing—you guys watched the earlier panel.

Anything that is required under the NDAA, if you will just make sure or you let us know where you are in the process because it can't be a lot of fun to be up here and then somebody asks you why you didn't do it.

If you could make sure you let us know where you are and anything that you think that is required under the NDAA. So, that will be helpful. Secretary Wagner, Space Force just celebrated its third birthday last December. I think a lot of us are concerned that many Americans don't really understand why—Space Force—or why our national security matters in space. What are you doing to raise the profile of the Space Force, introduce the unique missions of guardians to the America's youth, and compete for talent with the booming private sector commercial space industry, especially in my great State of Florida?

Mr. WAGNER. Ranking Member Scott, I am excited to talk about the U.S. Space Force. Three years in, the mission is incredibly important. It helps every day protect not only our modern way of war, but more importantly, our modern way of life.

We are excited to continue to work with Congress to develop a proposal to manage talent in the Space Force very differently than

we have in the rest of the military departments. You will be seeing a legislative proposal on that topic in order to allow us to access a different type of talent and to have a talent process where we are able to have a better permeability between full time and part time guardians.

We can do that for two reasons. One, because of the small size of the Space Force, but also because of the ability to attract high tech STEM talent. We are focused on building brand identity because, frankly, the American people really don't understand what the Space Force is or what they do, and so we are committing this year to spend \$12 million on building that brand identity, principally with influencers.

You know, the Space Force today is meeting its recruiting mission, but we are concerned about the future. Finally, in the era of declining propensity, we need to access a greater variety of talent and, as I said, manage them differently.

In order to access that specialized STEM talent, we need to take on new approaches and try some new things. I think the space is leading the way. I think to get to your question, folks who have the ability to look at the option of military service today differently than maybe one would have looked in the past where it is a full career.

Today, being able to talent manage and say, I am going to go take a couple of years off to focus on making sure my kids get into college or raising them at a certain time or take care of a sick parent, those are some of the things that we are looking at in order to allow people to plan their careers differently and see themselves serving in a different way than we could have done before.

Senator SCOTT. Thank you. Secretary Schaefer, the Army, as you know, has had trouble with recruiting, and so I think you guys have relied more on retaining. So how does that impact the readiness of the Army?

Dr. SCHAEFER. Thank you for your question. So, I think that this really is—end strength is sort of a three-legged stool as we think about it. So, we have accessions, attrition, and retention, and our retention is historically high right now, which is wonderful. I think that that, somebody mentioned it in the earlier panel, that once we get them through the door, they want to stay.

We are really focused on addressing the civilian military divide that we talked about. My sense is it keeps getting wider and deeper. I think there is, in the Army in particular, there is a sort of historical piece to this as well. We BRACed a lot of our installations in the Northern part of the country.

Our biggest recruiting tool is somebody walking down the street in uniform and talking to people about their experiences, and they just don't see that in the Northern part of the country or know somebody who has in the military in general. I think that creates a huge knowledge as well as cultural gap that we need to fill.

So, along with what Secretary Wagner mentioned, we too are looking at this. I am bringing my RAND lens to this and thinking about all of the complaints that I have heard over the years from servicemembers.

A lot of it is this, it is too hard to serve in many instances. That is what I keep hearing, and it is modernizing these systems, right?

We have a postindustrial personnel system, and it is those annoying things that people are sort of working through.

I want to make sure that we don't lose people because of those annoying things, so that we can bolster and keep that retention piece high, as we try to bridge this gap across the civil military divide on the recruiting side.

Senator SCOTT. Thank you. Thank you, Chairwoman.

Senator WARREN. Thank you. Secretary—Senator Blumenthal. I am promoting everybody today. Senator Blumenthal.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. Secretary Parker, I had a dialog with Secretary Cisneros, I don't know whether you were in the room at the time. So, you know that I asked about the sailors on the USS *Washington*, in particular, Xavier Sandor. It is a Connecticut family. The others are from elsewhere in the United States. In addition, there are others who have committed suicide. Is there a report, and when will it be released?

Mr. PARKER. Senator Blumenthal, thank you very much. I was present for your prior comments, and I appreciate your concern and advocacy on this point. I am familiar with the report.

That is the phase two report from the GW investigation. This one pertains to quality of service. I believe this is the report that you are referring to, and so, this looks really kind of at the quality of service, quality of life factors influencing the sailors who died by suicide during that period.

I understand that report will be released this spring, and I commit to you that I will go back and really push for the speediest issuance of that report.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Well, I would like to see the report now. Meaning—now. Why is that not possible?

Mr. PARKER. Senator, I have not seen the report personally myself either, but that is something I will take back and see how—

Senator BLUMENTHAL. It is almost a year after Xavier Sandor took his own life. I think the family has a right to see that report. What would you say to the family? What would you say to John Sandor? His son committed suicide almost 11 months, a day ago, and the Navy still has not given him the facts. What would you say to him?

Mr. PARKER. Senator, I have no response that I could give to him that would be sufficient.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Well, my response would be, I will show him the report, ask him to come down. I am going to invite him to come down next week, and I would like you to come to a meeting with me in my office and John Sandor. Will you do that?

Mr. PARKER. I will, Senator.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. All right, and I hope you will bring the report.

Mr. PARKER. I will go back and I commit to you, I will do my very best, Senator, but I will be in that meeting next week.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Well, with all due respect, and I know this is not your decision alone, so I am not blaming you personally, but I am a dad. Two of my sons have served. One as a Marine Corps Infantry Officer in Afghanistan. The other is a Navy SEAL, and if it were my son, I would be pretty angry. So, I hope you can be there with the report.

Mr. PARKER. Senator, I look forward to working with you on this issue. I will do my very best, but I will be in that meeting if you desire.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Senator WARREN. Thank you, Senator Blumenthal. I want to thank our witnesses for their service. I want to thank you for testifying today.

I also want to thank John Clark, Gary Leeling, Andy Scott, Sofia Kamali, Sean O'Keefe, Katie Magnus, and Brendan Gavin for their work in putting together today's hearing. I value your contributions and I look forward to working with all of you.

Today's hearing makes it clear that we still have a lot of work to do to offer our servicemembers, our extended military families, and even our civilian employees, and the civilians who interact with our military the very best.

I look forward to working with Ranking Member Scott as we go forward on a bipartisan basis to do the very best for our people. Thank you all. This hearing is closed.

[Whereupon, at 5:11 p.m., the Committee adjourned.]

[Questions for the record with answers supplied follow:]

#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ELIZABETH WARREN

##### CIVILIAN CARE IN JAPAN

1. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, I appreciate that DOD reversed its policy to reduce healthcare for DOD-affiliated civilians and contractors at bases in Japan. However, I remain concerned about the steps that were taken in making this decision and the under-resourcing of healthcare at Japan bases. Are any military treatment facilities in Japan trauma certified and what levels of emergency treatment are available at urgent care clinics?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. There are no trauma-certified military medical treatment facilities (MTF) in Japan.

2. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, how many cases have you had in the past 5 years where DOD-affiliated civilians or contractors have had to request leave in order to get access to medical services that were not available to them in Japan?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Unfortunately, there is no mechanism within the Department to track or maintain awareness of medical leave for DOD-affiliated civilians or contractors. The Department does not collect data for the rationale of sick leave requests for travel or otherwise.

3. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, is DOD currently evaluating or has it previously evaluated reducing access for DOD-affiliated civilians and contractors at military treatment facilities at other bases around the world? If so, which bases? Please specify whether these evaluations have been completed, their findings, and which are still ongoing.

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Section 199.17 of Title 32, Code of Federal Regulations provides direction regarding space available care for personnel who are not Active Duty servicemembers or their family members when outside of the continental United States (OCONUS). To increase the efficient use of OCONUS MTFs, these MTFs are expected to offer any additional appointments available to non-Active Duty servicemembers and their family members, if the care requested is within the scope of the MTF's capabilities and the MTF can safely provide care.

4. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, I sent a letter to the Defense Health Agency dated January 23, 2023 on this issue that was due on February 15, 2023. When can I expect a response?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. DHA apologizes for the delay in response. A response dated March 14, was mailed to your office. The Department is available to provide further information if needed.

5. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, what steps is DOD taking to evaluate how to better support DOD-affiliated civilians and contractors in healthcare at bases overseas?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. At the direction of the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs (ASD(HA)), the Defense Health Agency (DHA) issued a standard guidance memorandum on space-available care overseas on March 3, 2023, which supersedes all other DHA guidance. This guidance states that appointments not used for Active Duty servicemembers and their families may be used to provide space-available care. The Office of the ASD(HA), working closely with other key stakeholders in the Department of Defense, is developing solutions to address the other concerns the Under Secretary and Acting Assistant Secretary heard while in Japan that lie outside the scope of space available care.

#### SUICIDE PREVENTION AND MENTAL HEALTH

6. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, DOD announced on March 16 that it would be implementing ten of the recommendations from the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee (SPRIRC). What specific steps is DOD taking to implement each of these recommendations and when does it expect these recommendations to be implemented?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. The Secretary of Defense has provided direct guidance, including designating specific leadership for each of the 10 recommendations and the authority under which the directed component is operating to implement the immediate response recommendations. The Under Secretaries of Defense for (Personnel & Readiness) and (Intelligence & Security) and Director, Defense Health Agency are already leveraging current authorities to rapidly implement the recommendations designated to them. In addition, information campaigns in support of other recommendations are in development.

Finally, DOD has designated \$8M funding in the President's Budget for fiscal year 24 to implement additional recommendations of the SPRIRC as well as designated the leadership of the Suicide Prevention Implementation Working Group to take these efforts into the second phase of implementation.

7. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, the SPRIRC report emphasizes the critical need to limit or reduce access to highly lethal methods for suicide. What steps are you taking to reduce access to these methods, particularly firearms, and which of the SPRIRC recommendations regarding lethal means reduction do you plan to implement?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Lethal Means Safety has been and will remain a priority for the Department's suicide prevention efforts. While the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee provided a number of recommendations supporting Lethal Means Safety, the Department is currently in the process of assessing these recommendations and developing implementation courses of action to present to the Secretary of Defense. Until the Secretary has reviewed the Department's proposed response, we cannot be certain of which of the recommendations regarding Lethal Means Safety will be implemented. With that said, firearms continue to be the primary method of suicide death for servicemembers, their spouses, and dependents.

Suicide attempts using a firearm are overwhelmingly more likely to result in death than other methods. Further, research has found that servicemembers at risk for suicide frequently practice unsafe firearm storage, and individuals with ready access to a firearm are at increased risk of dying by suicide. In addition, putting time and space between a person in crisis and their access to lethal means has been shown to be an effective way to prevent suicide.

Given such evidence, promoting lethal means safety is a critical component of suicide prevention efforts within the Department and across the Federal Government. This is reflected in the White House strategy for military and veteran suicide, which was published in November 2021, and guides comprehensive, interagency suicide prevention efforts and draws attention to the need for identifying and promoting lethal means safety practices, such as safe storage of firearms and medication.

Within the Department, the Deputy Secretary of Defense directed a Department-wide effort to promote lethal means safety through plans developed by each of the Military Services, tailored to the needs of their servicemembers. These plans were built around the Lethal Means Safety suite of tools and highlight the importance of safe firearm and medication storage practices in mitigating suicide risk through messaging and resources. This suite includes a guide to lethal means safety for servicemembers and their families, sample public messaging, communications guidance for leaders and service providers, and a toolkit intended to help support col-

laborations with firearm retailers, disseminate suicide prevention information, and promote safe firearm storage.

Another key component of the Department's Lethal Means Safety effort is the continued implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM) training. CALM training aims to increase awareness of risk factors for suicide and to increase safe storage practices of lethal means among servicemembers. CALM prepares non-medical military support providers with counseling strategies to promote safe use and storage of firearms for individuals at risk for suicide. Since 2019, more than 2,000 non-medical providers, including Military and Family Life Counselors, have participated in CALM training. The Department is further developing a modified version of CALM training that will be available online. In addition, in August 2022, the Defense Health Agency developed and mandated training on lethal means safety for all of its health care providers—those in behavioral health as well those in other specialties.

Additionally, by promoting lethal means safety early in a servicemember's career, the Department aims to enhance early adoption of safe firearm storage practices. The Department is sponsoring research to identify best practices for integrating lethal means safety into early military career training, such as basic recruit training and Officer Candidate School.

The Department will continue to assess current DOD and Service-level lethal means safety (LMS) policies to better understand how these policies are implemented to assist in identifying and resolving any gaps and ensuring consistency throughout organizational levels.

8. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, can you please provide data on the breakdown of suicides by service over the past 5 years?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. The Department publishes suicide data quarterly for each Component and Service on a public facing web site for the Defense Suicide Prevention Office. The Quarterly Suicide Report (QSR) provides the most up-to-date counts of all suicide deaths (confirmed and pending) for each Calendar Year (CY) quarter. Suicide numbers are reported to DSPO by the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES). The counts are reconciled with the Military Services to ensure the most accurate information is reported. The last report (though Quarter 4 of CY 2022) shows the number of servicemembers who died by suicide for the last 5 years. The number of suicide deaths in the current report are preliminary and subject to change, as previously unknown cases are reported and some known cases are further investigated.

DoD Component and Service	CY 2018	CY 2019	CY 2020	CY 2021	CY 2022
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
<b>Active Component</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>328</b>
Army	141	145	174	175	136
Marine Corps	57	47	63	43	59
Navy	68	73	65	60	70
Air Force	60	83	81	50	63
<b>Reserve Component</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>Reserve</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>64</b>
Army Reserve	48	37	42	46	38
Marine Corps Reserve	19	9	10	14	6
Navy Reserve	11	7	13	10	7
Air Force Reserve	3	13	12	5	13
<b>National Guard</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>96</b>
Army National Guard	119	76	105	105	82
Air National Guard	17	14	16	15	14

9. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, what mental health services do you provide to DOD-affiliated civilians and contractors and what steps do you plan to take to support those communities in suicide prevention?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. DOD civilians and contractors, who are also beneficiaries of the Military Health System and enrolled to TRICARE, have access to all mental health or behavioral health services available to their enrollment category. Generally, the Department does not provide treatment for non-beneficiaries in its MTFs or private care sector unless it is authorized by statute, legislation, or memorandum of agreement. A percentage of DOD civilians and contract employees are non-beneficiaries. However, in a crisis such as a person with suicidal ideation, a behavioral health provider at a local MTF will often conduct a safety assessment and then refer the individual appropriately. That would be the extent of behavioral health intervention for DOD-affiliated civilians and contractors who are non-beneficiaries.

DOD civilians are also eligible for the DOD Employee Assistance Program (EAP). EAP provides short-term behavioral health counseling, safety assessment for high risk individuals and referral to appropriate care. The EAP is not a substitute for the long-term behavioral health counseling that can be obtained from the civilian employee's health insurance. The coverage of behavioral health services for DOD contractors is based on the terms of their contracts.

10. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, what steps are DOD and the Services taking to address concerns about drug overdoses among Active Duty servicemembers?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. The Department has comprehensive, evidence-based strategies to address and prevent drug misuse and overdose utilizing a combination of prevention, effective treatment, and harm reduction programs. Our robust, randomized drug testing program historically has helped keep illicit drug misuse at very low levels and was one of the first workplace drug testing programs to include fentanyl testing.

We recognize that drug misuse is dynamic and changes over time, which is why our policies and programs maintain flexibility to adapt to these changes. We continue work to identify installations and regional areas with higher drug positive rates, to include high fentanyl positive rates and high polydrug rates. Our efforts increase focus on these areas, to include drug testing, anti-drug prevention and education efforts, and healthcare resources.

Additionally, the Department aims to dispel the stigma of seeking services for concerns related to problematic substance use by implementing notification practices that are consistent with DODI 6490.08, "Command Notification to Dispel Stigma." Further, the DOD promotes embedded mental health and integrated primary care mental health programs, which address stigma associated with mental health treatment by increasing immediate access and improving mental health literacy. These programs place mental health resources in close proximity to servicemembers, reducing barriers to accessing care.

Addressing drug abuse and preventing overdose deaths in our force will continue to be a high priority for the Department.

11. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, how does DOD and the services plan to use SPRIRC's recommendation to develop a misuse prevention policy (recommendation 5.1.2) and align substance abuse treatment programs with behavioral health treatment programs (recommendation 6.26) to help address substance use among servicemembers?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Following the SPRIRC report and its recommendations, Sec. Austin signed a memorandum directing a two-phase approach to drive progress on implementation.

In the first phase, Sec. Austin's immediate actions include improvements to access behavioral and mental healthcare—with a focus on rapid and effective implementation—such as expediting hiring for behavioral health professionals, expanding opportunities to treat common mental health conditions in primary care, and improved utilization of behavioral health technicians.

In the second phase, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness established an Implementation Working Group (IWG) to assess feasibility of implementing each of the remaining SPRIRC recommendations; identify any program, policy, resourcing, barriers, and timeline matters that may need to be addressed, as appropriate; and, to the extent applicable, identify recommendations that can be synchronized with other prevention activities that resulted from the earlier Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military. Once the Secretary reviews and approves any recommendations from the IWG, the Department will up-

date Congress on new actions, including those that may relate to substance abuse treatment and behavioral health matters.

While we recognize that suicide has no single cause—and no single preventative action, treatment, or cure will eliminate every individual suicide death—we will exhaust every effort to promote the wellness, health, and morale of our Total Force.

12. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, is DOD coordinating with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to align substance abuse treatment programs with behavioral health treatment programs (recommendation 6.26)?

Mr. CISNEROS. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin is directing multiple immediate actions following the SPRIRC's recommendations and establishing a "Suicide Prevention Implementation Working Group" (IWG). Immediate actions focus on improving access to mental health care, through actions such as expediting hiring for behavioral health professionals, expanding opportunities to treat common mental health conditions in primary care, and improved utilization of behavioral health technicians. The IWG is coordinating with stakeholders from across the Department, including the Services, to evaluate the remaining recommendations of the SPRIRC. Many of the Department's subject matter experts on substance abuse matters routinely work with or leverage best practices from colleagues from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The Secretary has directed the working group to give full consideration to all other SPRIRC recommendations, and the IWG will provide him with recommendations on the feasibility and impact of each one in an Implementation Plan due to the Secretary by June 2, 2023.

13. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, in the DOD's response letter on February 23, you noted significant installation trends with the 31 fatal overdoses at Fort Bragg, 16 at Fort Hood, and 13 at both Fort Bliss and San Diego. Are there specific steps DOD is taking to address response efforts at installations with the highest fatal overdoses?

Mr. CISNEROS. As part of ongoing efforts to refine and improve the DOD Overdose Prevention Strategy, the Department continues to establish more expedient monitoring of fatal and nonfatal drug overdoses, drug testing and drug positive rates with associated demographics at the DOD, Service, regional, State and installation level. This will better allow the Department to communicate trends, life-saving prevention and drug related messaging at the DOD, installation, and command levels and help mobilize prevention, education, outreach and healthcare resources to high-risk regions and installations.

14. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, in the DOD's response letter on February 23, you mentioned that naloxone or other FDA and enterprise-approved opioid antagonists are available to outpatients considered at risk for opioid overdose. What does the DOD consider at risk?

Mr. CISNEROS. DOD defines "high-risk" as meeting any one the following criteria: 1) patients who have been treated with opioid therapy (excluding Tramadol) for at least 90 days in the past 180 days; 2) patients who are being treated with a combination of both opioid therapy and benzodiazepines (for at least 2 days overlap in the given month); 3) patients who are taking a high-dose of opioid therapy (technically defined as a "Morphine Equivalent Daily Dose" greater than or equal to 50); or 4) patients who score greater than 32 on the Risk Index for Overdose or Serious Opioid-induced Respiratory Depression (RIOSORD). The RIOSORD score is a published, validated measure that is assigned based on multiple factors, such as recent treatment or hospitalization for certain medical and mental health conditions; types of opioids and other medications prescribed; and the patient's current dose of opioid therapy.

15. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, is DOD considering increasing the availability of naloxone?

Mr. CISNEROS. Naloxone is already available to any ADMS or Tricare beneficiary who 1) meets high-risk criteria, 2) in accordance with the provider's clinical judgment, or 3) at the request of the patient. DHA guidance specifying when and how naloxone should be dispensed to patients is contained in DHA-Procedural Instruction 6025.07 "Naloxone Prescribing and Dispensing by Pharmacists in Medical Treatment Facilities (MTFs)", and DHA-Administrative Instruction 6025.08 "Pain management and Opioid Safety in Military Medical Treatment Facilities."

16. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, is the DOD looking at making fentanyl test strips and other harm reduction materials available?

Mr. CISNEROS. The Department does not make fentanyl strips available, but has developed NARCAN distribution policies. DOD is constantly evaluating changes to policy considering the commercial availability of the fentanyl test strips in the future.

17. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, does the DOD survey whether a friend or family member of the servicemember is struggling with their mental health or a substance use order?

Mr. CISNEROS. We are not currently aware of any organization wide health-related surveys that specifically ask about the mental health and/or substance use disorder struggles of a servicemember's friend or family member. This includes individual surveys, like the servicemembers Periodic Health Assessment and population surveys like the DOD Health Related Behaviors Survey (HRBS).

18. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, is DOD considering any changes to improve the drug take back program and help address overdoses among servicemembers?

Mr. CISNEROS. DOD does not plan to adjust the current Drug Take Back program. The program is extensively available to our beneficiaries and covers all drug take back options with over 13,000 collection receptacles at MTFs and pre-paid mail-back envelopes. These are provided at no cost to all beneficiaries. Additionally, as of April 3, 2023, the United States Food and Drug Administration is requiring manufacturers of opioid analgesics dispensed in outpatient settings to make prepaid mail-back envelopes available to outpatient pharmacies and other dispensers as an additional opioid analgesic disposal option for patients.

#### JUNIOR RESERVE OFFICERS' TRAINING CORPS (JROTC) PROGRAM

19. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Schaefer, Parker, and Wagner, in a letter sent to my office on March 14 the Department of Defense wrote that all of the memorandums of agreement for the JROTC program are under review. Does that review include adding language prohibiting programs from enrolling students without their consent or prohibiting mandatory participation?

Assistant Secretary SCHAEFER. In coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness is drafting a standardized Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) memorandum of agreement that will include language that student participation in the program shall be strictly voluntary.

Mr. PARKER. Yes, the Department of the Navy, in coordination with the Office of Secretary of Defense and the other Services' Secretaries, will issue a standardized memorandum of agreement that will include language prohibiting programs from enrolling students without their consent and prohibiting mandatory participation.

Mr. WAGNER. Yes. The current AFJROTC Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) already contains language indicating the program is to be voluntary. This is stated multiple times and is signed by each School District Superintendent. OSD is currently revising a uniform MOA for all DOD JROTC programs, and we understand that this version will include this same language to make clear to schools that this is a voluntary program.

20. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Schaefer, Parker, and Wagner, when do you think your memorandums of agreement for JROTC programs will be complete?

Ms. SCHAEFER. In coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness is drafting a standardized Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) memorandum of agreement. Once complete, the Army will adhere to its content.

Mr. PARKER. The revised standardized memorandum of agreement, is currently in the final development stage, pending Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval.

Mr. WAGNER. OSD is drafting and coordinating the new standardized MOAs. They have indicated a timeline of July 2023 for completion subject to OPM approval. Once OSD provides the Department of the Air Force an approved standardized MOA, within 2 weeks, we will add Department specific additions (e.g., minimum required storage space, access to an appropriately sized marching practice area) and begin the signature process with school superintendents. HQ AFJROTC expects all MOAs to be formally signed by the associated school district superintendents within 6 months given our presence at approximately 600 different school districts.

21. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Schaefer, Parker, and Wagner, will you provide copies of the revised memorandums of agreement for JROTC programs to the Committee?

Ms. SCHAEFER. In coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness is drafting a standardized Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) memorandum of agreement. Once complete, the Army will provide copies.

Mr. PARKER. Yes, copies of the revised memorandum of agreement will be provided to the Committee.

Mr. WAGNER. Once the revised standardized MOAs are finalized, and Department specific additions made, we will provide a copy as requested.

22. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Schaefer, Parker, and Wagner, do memorandums of agreement include any penalties if a school does not allow a student to transfer from the JROTC elective?

Ms. SCHAEFER. The Army does not influence schools on their enrollment decisions. The Army does not have a policy requiring or prohibiting automatic enrollment into JROTC classes except for military secondary educational institutions, at which JROTC enrollment is a prerequisite that students/parents agree to prior to attendance. While the Army does not endorse mandatory enrollment, we have always recognized and believed that it was in the best interest of the program to allow local school officials and parents to decide what works best in their communities.

Mr. PARKER. The current memorandum of agreement (MOA) does not include any penalties for schools that do not allow a student to transfer from the JROTC elective. However, the revised MOA will prohibit schools from enrolling students without their consent and prohibit mandatory participation. The Department of the Navy's JROTC program will work with schools and school districts' administrations to adhere to respective schools' enrollment policies to transfer students who wish to disenroll from JROTC academic courses to another academic course to meet high school graduation requirements.

Mr. WAGNER. Yes, schools that do not comply with this requirement will be placed on probation until corrected. HQ AFJROTC does follow up to ensure corrective actions have taken place. If the school chooses not to comply (disregards the MOA), AFJROTC will notify the school district the unit will be closed. To date, however, AFJROTC does not have any indication of non-voluntary enrollments.

23. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Schaefer, Parker, and Wagner, the Department of Defense's March 14 response said "the military services inform JROTC instructors during new instructor training that they should not solicit donations from any corporate entities or local businesses." What is the penalty if an instructor solicits funds in violation of this policy?

Ms. SCHAEFER. Army JROTC programs are allowed to accept funds from outside entities to support the JROTC program/unit. U.S. Army Cadet Command (USACC) does not have a written policy regarding JROTC instructors supporting fundraising for outside entities; that activity would be covered by the local school/district policy.

USACC Regulation 145-2 governs JROTC instructors' fundraising activities to support the JROTC unit. It states:

*4-10. Fundraising Activities*

*a. Fundraising in JROTC serves to provide goods and services that supplement the educational, curricular, and co-curricular activities of the unit. All fundraising activities are controlled by the respective schools and must be conducted in accordance with their rules and requirements. The following are guidelines per this regulation:*

*(1) Cadet participation is voluntary and grades will not be affected by participation or lack thereof.*

*(2) Wearing the Army uniform is strictly prohibited.*

*(3) Salaries, staff development, and in-service activities are not allowable expenditures.*

*(4) Government equipment or funds cannot be used in fundraising. (p. 47)*

If a JROTC instructor were to violate the terms of USACC Regulation 142-5, the Army, in coordination with the local school/district, would review the facts and take appropriate administrative action.

Mr. PARKER. All policy violations are reviewed on a case-by-case basis in partnership with the host school's administration. Instructors found in violation of this policy are subject to unsatisfactory marks on their annual performance evaluation, which could result in the instructor being placed in a probationary status. The instructor is also subject to having their certification suspended.

Mr. WAGNER. AFJROTC Instruction defines the policy on soliciting donations. Any substantiated policy violation by an instructor can lead to suspension, probation, or decertification and removal.

24. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Schaefer, Parker, and Wagner, how many JROTC instructors have violated the policy that prohibits soliciting donations from any corporate entities or local businesses in the past 10 years?

Assistant Secretary SCHAEFER. The Army does not prohibit soliciting donations from corporate entities or local businesses. Schools apply for outside funds based on local school/district policies. JROTC instructors who submit funding requests do so as employees of their schools/districts.

Mr. PARKER. The Department of the Navy has not received any reports of JROTC instructors violating the policy in the past 10 years.

Mr. WAGNER. None. The Air Force has no records indicating violations of this policy over the last 10 years. HQ AFJROTC has spent significant amounts of energy on providing instructor training in this area. Additionally, this topic is part of the HQ AFJROTC inspection checklist.

25. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Schaefer, Parker, and Wagner, the Department of Defense's March 14 response said memorandums of agreement "are under review and will clarify fundraising guidelines." When will that review be complete?

Ms. SCHAEFER. In coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness is drafting a standardized Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) memorandum of agreement that will include language clarifying fundraising guidelines.

Mr. PARKER. The review of the memorandum of agreement as it relates to fundraising guidelines is complete.

Mr. WAGNER. OSD is drafting and coordinating the new standardized MOAs. They have indicated a timeline of July 2023 for completion subject to OPM approval.

26. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Schaefer, Parker, and Wagner, will the review of memorandums of agreement include evaluating the voluntary donation policy?

Ms. SCHAEFER. In coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness is drafting a standardized Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) memorandum of agreement which includes evaluating the voluntary donation policy.

Mr. PARKER. Yes, the review includes evaluating the voluntary donation policy.

Mr. WAGNER. OSD is drafting and coordinating the new standardized MOAs. All policies to include the voluntary donation policy are being reviewed during the development of the standardized MOA.

27. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Wagner, what is the Air Force's policy to decertify a school under the JROTC program?

Mr. WAGNER. AFJROTC uses the term deactivation in reference to closing schools and uses the term decertify in reference to decertifying instructors. HQ AFJROTC attempts to work with schools that are non-compliant by placing them on probation and giving them the opportunity to correct the issue. Continued non-compliance with the MOA will result in deactivation and closure of the unit.

28. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Wagner, how many times would a school have to fail to report sexual assault or sexual harassment by a JROTC instructor to be considered a violation of the memorandum of agreement?

Mr. WAGNER. A single failure to report is considered a violation and not in compliance with the MOA.

29. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Wagner, how many times has the Air Force decertified a school for failing to report sexual assault or sexual harassment?

Mr. WAGNER. To date, HQ AFJROTC has not deactivated any schools for failing to report occurrences of sexual assault or sexual harassment. The HQ AFJROTC program has been notified of 26 sexual misconduct allegations occurring over the last decade. In every case the instructor has been decertified by HQ AFJROTC.

30. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Schaefer, Parker, and Wagner, how many times has your service decertified a JROTC program in the past 10 years?

Assistant Secretary SCHAEFER. The Army certifies and decertifies individual instructors, not schools or JROTC programs. In the past 10 years, the Army has not

closed any JROTC programs for cause, although school officials may request that the Army close a program (usually for financial reasons).

Mr. PARKER. The Department of the Navy does not decertify programs, but instead mutually disestablish the unit. Over the past 10 years, the DON has disestablished a total of 63 units (38 NJROTC/NNDC units and 25 MCJROTC units). The disestablishment of the 63 units was due to the host schools' inability to maintain the statutory enrollment requirement.

Mr. WAGNER. AFJROTC uses the term deactivation when closing schools and uses the term decertify when decertifying instructors. From 1 July 2013 to 20 April 2023, the Air Force has deactivated 119 AFJROTC programs. The primary two reasons for these deactivations include failure of the school to maintain viability (minimum # of cadets) or maintain the minimum # of instructors.

#### SERVICEMEMBER MEDICAL DEBT

31. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, does DOD currently collect any data about the incidence of medical debt among servicemembers and their families?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. The TRICARE program does not currently collect data on medical debt. However, there are systems in place to assist servicemembers and their families with medical claims that should have been paid.

DOD TRICARE customer service representatives assist with medical debt issues that are self-reported by affected servicemembers and their families.

TRICARE policy grants specific urgency to medical debts currently in collections. DOD has identified Debt Collection Assistance Officers (DCAOs), who work with the Managed Care Support Contractors (MCSC) to resolve claims that should have been paid under the TRICARE benefit.

DHA policy requires DCAOs to log cases into DHA's Assistance Reporting Tool (ART). Debt Collection cases in ART do not account for all incidences of medical debt amount servicemembers and families.

There are multiple ways for servicemembers to receive claims assistance from the government and the managed care support contractors. There is no central system to definitively capture all issues.

32. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, if so, what types of data in question 1 does DOD collect and what do these data reveal about the extent of medical debt among servicemembers and their families, including:

- (i) What types of treatments did servicemembers or their families receive that led to medical debt?;
- (ii) What types of providers did servicemembers or their families see that led to medical debt?; and
- (iii) Is DOD gathering data about the types of medical debt collection practices such as lawsuits, garnishing wages, and credit reporting?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. TRICARE collects self-reported debt collection items resulting from claim denials and recoupments by a TRICARE MCSC or from medical claims never submitted to TRICARE for processing.

The data is not complete enough to accurately report the "extent" or amount of medical debt among servicemembers and their families.

The "average amount of medical debt" among servicemembers cannot be accurately calculated due to the numerous venues from which to seek assistance, and the reliance of self-reporting.

- (i) "Types of treatments" is not a tracked category. The notes within individual ART cases may have additional details on the types of treatments.
- (ii) "Types of providers," by specialty or status, is not a tracked category. Notes within individual ART cases may have additional details on the provider type or specialty involved.
- (iii) The TRICARE benefit program does not collect data regarding the types of medical debt collection practices. DOD TRICARE Beneficiary Counselors and DCAOs assist beneficiaries on a case-by-case basis in resolving TRICARE medical claims issues that result in medical bills being sent to collections, or wage garnishments from the Department of Treasury due to unpaid medical claims that should have been submitted to TRICARE or paid as a covered benefit.

33. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, if DOD does not collect the data referenced in question 1 and 2, what would be required for DOD to begin collecting these data?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. This data would have to be self-reported by beneficiaries. DOD would need to establish a centralized reporting system or data base where types of medical debt collection practices would be recorded. All Military Health System (MHS) personnel who assist in resolving TRICARE beneficiary claims issues would need access. Additionally, the MCSCs would need a contract requirement to track and label medical debt collection practices in greater detail.

34. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, does DOD consider medical debt when making hiring decisions or when considering promotions for servicemembers?

Mr. CISNEROS. Individual military personnel are promoted on the basis of merit, their manner of performance to date and their ability to serve in the higher grade. Debts, including medical debts, are not taken into consideration when promotions are being considered.

Additionally, medical debt is not a consideration for promotions for general and flag officers.

With respect to the hiring of civilian employees, medical debt is not taken into consideration. DOD components provide information about the availability of healthcare services in the host nation as well as space available care, as appropriate, in vacancy announcements and/or provide such information when making a tentative job offer. Such information allows selectees to make informed decisions about personal and/or family healthcare needs and costs prior to accepting a final job offer. Medical conditions nor health related issues do not factor into hiring decisions, except where there are physical requirements for certain positions.

35. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, if DOD does consider medical debt when making hiring decisions or when considering promotions for servicemembers, how many servicemembers have been denied promotions or a security clearance as a result of outstanding medical debt?

Mr. CISNEROS. With respect to the hiring of civilian employees, medical debt is not taken into consideration. Individual military personnel are promoted on the basis of merit, their manner of performance to date and their ability to serve in the higher grade. Debts, including medical debts, are not taken into consideration when promotions are being considered. Additionally, there have been no general or flag officers that have been denied promotions due to an outstanding medical debt because this is not a consideration of a promotion selection board.

36. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, if DOD does consider medical debt when making hiring decisions or when considering promotions for servicemembers, how many prospective servicemembers have been prevented from enlisting due to outstanding medical debt?

Mr. CISNEROS. With respect to the hiring of civilian employees, medical debt is not taken into consideration. Individual military personnel are promoted on the basis of merit: their manner of performance to date and their ability to serve in the higher grade. Debts, including medical debts, are not taken into consideration when promotions are being considered. Outstanding medical debts would not, in and of itself, disqualify someone from enlisting in the military. An individual's financial health is generally reviewed when an individual discloses a bankruptcy or is trying to enlist with a large family. In these cases, a broader assessment of the individual may be conducted. More significantly, any significant debt could make an individual a greater security risk and as such this type of debt would be more likely to impact someone's ability to get an advanced security clearance than it would their eligibility to join.

37. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, how has DOD engaged with medical providers or third-party billing companies to ensure medical claims for servicemembers insured through TRICARE are accurately processed? What has DOD discovered about the extent of these problems and what steps has DOD taken to address them?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. The DHA's TRICARE Health Plan Division is responsible for oversight, management, and performance assessment of the TRICARE MCSCs.

Subject matter experts with extensive experience and knowledge of the TRICARE program, health care administration, and specific topics such as medical management, claims and claims processing, networks, provider relations, customer service, enrollment, and all contract subject areas conduct routine oversight and assessment of contractor performance of requirements and metrics.

Oversight and performance assessment includes onsite reviews of contractors' systems and processes, review of contract required performance reports, and monitoring of inquiries or concerns regarding contractor performance.

All contract oversight and performance assessment activities and findings are documented, reporting to the Contracting Officers' Representatives and to the Contracting Officers.

The Contracting Officers utilize the contract oversight and performance assessment documentation to complete annual performance documentation in the Federal Contract Performance Assessment Reporting System.

Normal claims processing would not necessarily involve medical debt, as the possibility of medical debt is usually outside of the covered benefit claim or is the result of other issues causing a servicemember to incur debt.

If there are additional services, or out-of-network charges resulting from a decision by the beneficiary to seek care outside the normal TRICARE benefit, there could be a "balance bill," which is an amount owed above and beyond a TRICARE claim paid.

If a Military Service miscategorized the eligibility of a Servicemember, for example when the status of a retiree is not updated in the Defense Eligibility Enrollment Reporting System (DEERS) and the person continues to receive care as if an Active Duty servicemember (ADSM), once the record is corrected, all claims paid for services rendered are subject to recoupment and potential debt collection.

If an ADSM/Active Duty Family Member (ADFM) seeks any care in the private sector that is not a TRICARE covered benefit, or care from a non-network provider that requires balance billing, the ADSM/ADFM is responsible for all charges outside the TRICARE-covered benefits and if they fail to pay and had signed documents accepting responsibility to pay, the charges are likely to get sent to collections.

If an ADSM has medical debt, the DCAOs have specific policies and procedures to address medical debt and support beneficiaries.

Per TRICARE policy, there are specific policies and procedures for situations where a covered benefit that would normally be paid by TRICARE is also covered by another insurance company. This typically occurs in motor vehicle accidents involving personal injury, which are also covered by property and casualty insurance companies.

In these situations, the property and casualty company is a third party liable for the cost of the medical care, and TRICARE is required by statute to have the third party pay for the medical services.

If TRICARE has already paid for the medical care, recovery of the costs must be made from the third party or from the beneficiary if the third party has already paid for the services.

Third Party Liability (TPL) Recovery is the responsibility of the Uniformed Services Claims Officers (USCOs). The TRICARE MCSCs are responsible for making a preliminary investigation of all potential third-party recoveries.

Any medical claim with specific diagnosis codes defined by TRICARE and having a potential TRICARE liability exceeding \$500, shall be considered a potential third-party claim and shall be developed with the questionnaire "Statement of personal Injury—Possible Third Party Liability" (DD Form 2527).

If the enrollee fails to submit a completed DD Form 2527 within 35 days when requested by the MCSC, the contractor will deny the claim.

Any claims which appear to be possible third-party claims shall be referred to the USCO for determination and recovery action, if appropriate.

Education of beneficiaries, private sector care providers, and MHS staff and providers on third party payment responsibility and recovery is accomplished through a collaborative effort between DHA Communications and the MCSCs.

The Government furnishes all printed educational materials, except for region-specific provider education materials.

The MCSCs provide an outreach and education program on TRICARE requirements for all network and TRICARE-authorized providers that includes education on applicable TRICARE program requirements, policies, and procedures.

MCSC outreach and education includes direct interactions with network and TRICARE authorized providers and information provided via web pages, TRICARE Provider Handbooks, and during monthly TRICARE webinars.

Published by the TRICARE overseas contractor and each TRICARE regional contractor, the Provider Handbook includes information on claims submission, reimbursement, how to avoid collection activities, and the TRICARE DCAO program.

Providers may also call the Customer Call Centers or Provider Relations for questions regarding TRICARE reimbursement and third-party billing.

In response to what DOD has discovered about the extent of these problems and the steps DOD has taken to address them, the TRICARE Health Plans Division's experience with TPL or billing issues with the MCSCs concluded that many of the problems are tied to beneficiaries and/or providers not understanding their role in the billing process.

Many cases sent to collections occur because there is no submitted claim on file. There are multiple reasons that contribute to cases being sent to collections, including patient failure to pay their co-payment or other balance due (which is a beneficiary responsibility), Network and TRICARE-authorized providers not following balance billing rules for TRICARE beneficiaries, Other Health Insurance Explanation of Benefit is missing, the required TPL form not being submitted, and missing medical documentation.

Additional reasons for cases being sent to collections include the beneficiary may have chosen to see a non-network provider or non-TRICARE authorized provider or decided to be seen for a Non-Covered Service.

While TRICARE Prime-enrolled beneficiaries are permitted to use the Point of Service (POS) option, which allows them to see non-network providers, this choice comes with the beneficiary's responsibility of paying the higher POS charges above what TRICARE covers.

To avoid beneficiary POS payments, the MCSCs encourage beneficiaries to follow TRICARE requirements for prior authorizations and to utilize the Network Provider Directories to select network providers, when available.

38. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, does DOD provide any services to help servicemembers address these billing concerns?

Mr. CISNEROS. DOD provides several avenues for servicemembers and their families to request assistance with unpaid medical claims that should have been covered by TRICARE.

The TRICARE MCSCs are the first level of customer service for TRICARE claims issues.

DOD TRICARE customer service representatives, most commonly those titled as Beneficiary Counseling and Assistance Coordinators (BCACs), are also available to assist with self-reported medical debt issues.

TRICARE policy grants specific urgency to medical debts currently in collections. DOD has identified DCAOs, who work with the MCSCs to resolve claims that should have been paid under the TRICARE benefit. BCAC and DCAO essential duties are outlined in DHA-PI 6015.02.

39. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, military personnel have access to free legal assistance, including for consumer issues. Is this available to help servicemembers and their families address debt collection, including medical bills? If so, how many servicemembers and their families seek assistance for these issues?

Mr. CISNEROS. Yes, the Military Services provide free legal assistance to servicemembers, their families, retirees, and in some circumstances civilian employees in accordance with 10 U.S.C. 1044. Legal assistance attorneys provide counseling on a wide variety of issues, including retail purchases, identity theft and other fraud, motor vehicle purchase or repair, bankruptcy, consumer credit, debt collection (including medical bills), indebtedness, involuntary allotments and consumer protections provided by Federal, State or local law. Legal assistance attorneys may even contact and negotiate with creditors to resolve disputes. When appropriate, attorneys will refer clients to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau or other relevant agencies. However, legal assistance attorneys are prohibited from providing assistance related to claims against the U.S. Government.

Additionally, the Department provides mandatory financial literacy training to servicemembers across the military lifecycle, in accordance with 10 U.S.C. 992(a). Financial literacy topic areas and terminal learning objectives include "Basic Finance" and "Understand the fundamentals and management of debt and credit," respectively. The Department's financial readiness programs also provide no-cost, on-demand personal financial counseling, in accordance with 10 U.S.C. 992(b), and supplemental education and resources to servicemembers and spouses.

When eligible legal assistance clients request to speak to a legal assistance attorney, the client will identify the general subject area that they need help with, such as, consumer affairs, debt, taxation, domestic relations, or wills and estate planning. The subject area is annotated and statistically trackable, but unfortunately the specifics of each issue (such as type of debt) are not captured. The specifics of any legal issue oftentimes include sensitive, personal information and therefore left to be discussed privately between the attorney and the client within their attorney-client relationship. Therefore, identifying the specific type of debt issue, such as medical debt, is not available.

In the past year, Military Service legal assistance attorneys have assisted with roughly 7,200 consumer and debt related legal issues across the Department. Specifically, over the past 12 months, the Army has assisted 1,910 clients (servicemembers, their families, and retirees) with "consumer law" issues and 262

clients with “debt” issues. The Department of the Air Force also tracks using both a “consumer affairs” category and a “personal finance/debt” category. Over the past 12 months the Air Force and Space Force have collectively assisted 1,200 clients with consumer affairs-related issues and 759 clients with personal finance/debt issues. The Navy and Marine Corps track debt issues under the broader category of “consumer law” and over the past 12 month the Navy has assisted approximately 2,400 clients and the Marine Corps approximately 700 clients in this area. Coast Guard legal assistance attorneys have also assisted seven clients in the past 12 months with “debt collection” issues.

40. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, has DOD issued guidance to servicemembers and their families to ensure they are aware of potential billing concerns between TRICARE and private medical providers?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. TRICARE Health Plans Customer Service Education and Outreach (CSEO) does not provide guidance concerning potential billing issues between TRICARE and private medical providers. However, CSEO does oversee MCSC actions to facilitate resolution when beneficiaries encounter billing issues with private medical providers, on a case-by-case basis, when resolution cannot be accomplished at the lowest levels.

41. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, how many complaints has TRICARE received about billing concerns from private medical providers? Regarding these complaints:

- (i) are the complaints evenly distributed across different provider types and geographies?;
- (ii) how many of these complaints result in medical debt?; and
- (iii) what steps does DOD take to ensure that servicemembers do not receive incorrect bills and that any missed payments for incorrect bills are not sent to collections?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. “Billing concerns from private medical providers” is not a category tracked by DOD, but the MCSCs provided the following:

Out of 64.7 million claims processed between January 2022 and February 2023, the MCSCs combined received 200 complaints from private medical providers regarding billing concerns.

- (i) The MCSCs reported that the 200 complaints received from private medical providers were evenly distributed across a wide variety of provider specialty types and were distributed across geographies as would be expected based on beneficiary populations.
- (ii) “Billing concerns from private medical providers” is not a category tracked by DOD, and the MCSCs may not have visibility on which complaints result in medical debt. Separate from the 200 complaints the MCSCs received from private medical providers, they also assisted DHA DCAOs with cases related to beneficiary medical debt. From January 2022 through February 2023, the MCSCs assisted the DCAOs with 4,273 cases related to beneficiaries sent to collections by a provider for a medical debt.
- (iii) The TRICARE program does not ensure the accuracy of bills received from individual providers. The decision to send a bill to collections remains with individual medical providers, and neither the DOD nor the TRICARE MCSCs can prevent a provider for taking this action. There exists the small possibility that incorrect bills from providers may be the result of claims payment errors by TRICARE MCSCs. For claims received by TRICARE MCSCs, processing accuracy standards are as follows:

TRICARE Operations Manual, Chapter 1, Section 3, Paragraph 1.6.1: Claim Payment Errors: The absolute value of the payment errors shall not exceed 2 percent of the total billed charges for the first two option periods. In all remaining option periods, the absolute value of the payment errors shall not exceed 1.75 percent of the total billed charges.

42. Senator WARREN. Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, is DOD exploring efforts to ensure that servicemembers and their families get mail regardless of where they are stationed?

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. DOD Instruction 4525.09 (Military Postal Service (MPS)) defines authorized patrons as, “individuals authorized to use MPS postal services and mail program within and outside the United States, consistent with international agreements; laws; and Federal, USPS, GSA, and DOD regulations.”

Over the last 50 years, MPS privileges expanded to 53 patron categories in 54 countries. While fiscal authority exists for each patron category, not all categories are authorized in every country because some host nation agreements do not permit them. Those patrons not authorized MPS privileges must use other means such as the host nation postal service.

A 2020 Human Resources Command legal review prompted the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and the Military Postal Service Agency (MPSA) to conduct a fiscal and host nation agreement review to identify patrons authorized MPS privileges by host nation agreement and U.S. law. At the conclusion of this review, MPSA will recommend retention of patron categories authorized by international agreements, laws, and regulations to OSD and will publish an approved patrons list authorized MPS privileges by country.

#### WORKFORCE REQUIREMENTS

43. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, Assistant Secretary Schaefer, Assistant Secretary Parker, and Assistant Secretary Wagner, according to repeated Government Accountability Office findings, the management of services contracts remains on the Department's high-risk list in part because of the failure of the so-called Services Requirements Review Boards to similarly validate and prioritize the workload requirements for services contracts, whose main focus continues to be on year of execution acquisition planning for individual contact transactions rather than strategic requirements validation and prioritization. While some Military Departments may have at one time documented contract services requirements on their manpower documents, and there was an Enterprise Contractor Manpower Reporting Application (ECMRA), it's unclear how DOD can properly oversee the size and cost of the contractor workforce. What systems does the Department currently use to measure this workforce?

Mr. CISNEROS. When the Department contracts for services, it is not purchasing individual people to perform the work. Rather, the Department is purchasing performance outcomes and deliverables and the number of contractors performing the work may not be relevant. For example, different companies might approach the same task ways that would lend themselves to greater or fewer personnel. Assuming the successful execution of the contract's requirements, this overall difference in labor would not be pertinent to the Department.

The Department focuses its efforts on getting the best value for taxpayer dollars by ensuring services performed meet DOD requirements efficiently and effectively. The Department continues to meet its statutory requirements from title 10, U.S.C. section 4505 via the annual submission of the Inventory of Contracts for Services, but it does not capture additional data points related to the number of contractor employees on contract for the Department for the reasons above.

Ms. SCHAEFER. The Army does not track the number of service contractors as we do not contract based on number of personnel; we contract based on the service required.

Mr. PARKER. The Department of the Navy does not currently collect contractor service workforce data, specifically, nor track the size and cost of such workforce other than through the Federal Procurement Data System (FPDS). The Department's position when contracting for services is that the procurement is for a product (performance outcomes and deliverables) and not the purchasing of service support from individual people. The number of contractors performing the work may not even be relevant. For example, different companies might approach the same task in a variety of ways lending themselves to more or fewer personnel being involved. Assuming the successful execution of the contract's requirements, this overall difference in labor would not be pertinent to the Department. Rather, the Department focuses its efforts on getting the best value for taxpayer dollars by ensuring services performed meet DOD requirements. The Department does continue to meet its statutory requirements from Title 10, U.S.C. section 4505 via the annual submission of the Inventory of Contracts for Services; however, it does not have a system or mechanism for additional data capture related to the number of contractor employees on contract beyond the FPDS.

Mr. WAGNER. The DAF is committed to overarching DOD efforts to collect data and monitor service acquisitions. The Department is focused on buying capabilities based on mission owner performance-based requirements that are achieved through approved, strategic acquisition strategies. The DAF Senior Services Manager provides a governance process for the acquisition and management of contracted services in accordance with DAFI 63-138, Acquisition of Services and DODI 5000.74, Defense Acquisition of Services.

The DAF is nearing closure on a revision of DAFI 63–138, Acquisition of Services, that seeks to improve the Department’s management of Air Force services acquisition programs ensuring their effective, efficient, and timely execution in support of mission needs. The revision encourages synergy within the services acquisition community, which consists of Program Managers/Services Acquisition Leads and designated multi-functional teams charged with developing, executing, and monitoring a services requirement from identification to contract close-out.

With regard to measuring the contractor workforce, the Department does not track numbers of contractors in the same way it does civilian and military personnel. For accountability purposes, the Department uses the Synchronized Pre-deployment and Operational Tracker-Enterprise Suite (SPOT-ES) in contingency areas outside the continental United States. Beyond that, the Department does not specifically track contractor personnel since contracts are based on dollars and associated deliverables to be provided. Since contractors are not employees of the Department, it is up to the contracting company to determine how many people are required to meet the deliverables under the contract.

The Department does comply with the requirements in 10 USC 4505 (previously 10 USC 2330a) to collect an annual Inventory of Contracts for Services (ICS). The Department submits and makes publicly available a summary of that Inventory every year. This information is provided by the SAF/AQ community. Services contract reporting is now codified with program Annual Execution Reviews (AERs) and an overall major command Effectiveness Review chaired by AFPEO, Combat and Mission Support (AFPEO/CM) on an annual basis. These reviews ensure commitments to out year requirements and budgeting are clearly understood across program stakeholders. In addition to required program reviews, the updated DAF policy requires AF leadership at major commands and field reporting units to ensure personnel assigned to work services acquisition elements within their organizations are properly resourced and trained on the services acquisition life cycle from requirements generation through contract closeout.

44. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, Assistant Secretary Schaefer, Assistant Secretary Parker, and Assistant Secretary Wagner, how many contractor full time equivalents did your Department and components have in 2021 and 2022?

Mr. CISNEROS. Per the Inventory of Contracts for Services (ICS) for fiscal year 2021, the Department had approximately 251,258 contractor full-time equivalents (CFTEs). The ICS for fiscal year 2022 has not yet been submitted by the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition and Sustainment), but it will contain CFTE data for fiscal year 2022 when it is published.

Ms. SCHAEFER. The Army does not track the number of Contract Full Time Equivalents (CFTEs). The estimated number of CFTEs is 117,853 for fiscal year 2021 and 114,119 for fiscal year 2022. These CFTE figures are calculated in accordance with Section 807 of Public Law 110-181 and are derived using approved Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment calculation methodologies. They do not represent an actual depiction of the contract workforce. The Contractor FTE data cited above is reported in the Army’s Operation & Maintenance Justification Budget Books for fiscal years 2018 to 2022.

Mr. PARKER. Per the Inventory of Contracts for Services (ICS) for fiscal year 2021, the Department had approximately 54,580 contractor full-time equivalents (CFTEs). The ICS for fiscal year 2022 has not yet been submitted and released from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, but it will contain CFTE data for fiscal year 2022 when complete.

Mr. WAGNER. Estimated fiscal year 2021 DOD Contractor FTEs Prime Contractors and Subcontractors for Contracts Required to be Reported Under 10 U.S.C. § 4505, by DOD Component: Department of the Air Force, 52,987.

Note, the information above has been provided to Congress, in fulfillment of the statutory requirements to supply an inventory of Department of Defense service contracts for certain activities, per Section 4505(c) of title 10, United States Code and per the annual Appropriations Act. This information is made available in the Inventory of Services Contracts data base by Defense Pricing and Contracting, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and is available at the following web site: <https://www.acq.osd.mil/asda/dpc/cp/policy/service-contract-inventory.html>

At this time, fiscal year 2022 FTE data has not been published.

45. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, Assistant Secretary Schaefer, Assistant Secretary Parker, and Assistant Secretary Wagner, what was the estimated cost of the contractor workforce in 2021 and 2022?

Mr. CISNEROS. Per the ICS for fiscal year 2021, approximately \$161.5 billion was obligated for the above-referenced 251,258 CFTEs. The ICS for fiscal year 2022 has

not yet been submitted by the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition and Sustainment), but it will contain cost data for fiscal year 2022 when it is published.

Ms. SCHAEFER. The Army cannot isolate the costs for the contractor workforce, and the amounts provided reflect what was executed on Service Contracts in total (excluding Ukraine and Supplementals). The estimated cost of the Army contractor workforce for fiscal year 2021 was \$31,185,965 for OMA, OMAR and OMNG. The estimated cost of the Army contractor workforce for fiscal year 2022 was \$30,422,715 for OMA, OMAR and OMNG.

Mr. PARKER. Per the ICS for fiscal year 2021, approximately \$9 billion was obligated for the above-referenced 54,580 CFTEs. The ICS for fiscal year 2022 has not yet been submitted to the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, but it will contain cost data for fiscal year 2022 when complete.

Mr. WAGNER. Estimated fiscal year 2021 cost of DOD Contractor FTEs Prime Contractors and Subcontractors for Contracts Required to be Reported Under 10 U.S.C. § 4505, by DOD Component and based on Total Dollar Amount Invoiced: Department of the Air Force, \$11,723,478,273 per above reference to 52,987 FTEs.

Note, the information above has been provided to Congress, in fulfillment of the statutory requirements to supply an inventory of Department of Defense service contracts for certain activities, per Section 4505(c) of title 10, United States Code and per the annual Appropriations Act. This information is made available in the Inventory of Services Contracts data base by Defense Pricing and Contracting, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and is available at the following web site: <https://www.acq.osd.mil/asda/dpc/cp/policy/service-contract-inventory.html>

At this time, fiscal year 2022 FTE data has not been published.

#### DOD CIVILIAN WORKFORCE READINESS

46. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, the Center for Naval Analysis (CNA) in September 2021 mapped much of the DOD civilian workforce to (1) intermediate and near-term readiness; (2) middle term readiness; and (3) long term readiness based on the missions to which the DOD civilian workforce were assigned rather than the traditional civilian personnel occupational series, which the CNA found less useful for the purposes of measuring the workforce's contribution to readiness. How has the Department changed its risk assessments involving the requirements performed by the DOD civilian workforce in response to this study?

Mr. CISNEROS. The Department has not changed its risk assessments in response to this study. Federally Funded Research and Development Centers such as CNA do excellent work for the Department, and my office frequently accepts and implements recommendations they make. In this case, the recommendations made by CNA were not considered for implementation as the Services already inform their risk assessments during the annual Program and Budget Review process. Also, the Department has Total Force Management policies that are aimed at providing a maximum amount of flexibility to local commanders and managers when evaluating risk, within the bounds of applicable law, regulation, and policy, who are best positioned to make workforce mix determinations.

47. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, how does the Department's programming and budgeting process consider civilian workforce readiness based on its missions?

Mr. CISNEROS. Strategic Readiness is the ability to build, maintain, and balance warfighting capabilities and competitive advantages that ensure the Department of Defense can achieve strategic objectives across threats and time horizons. This includes cultivating a workforce (civilian and military) with the appropriate disciplines and knowledge base to compete with our strategic competitors. The Department's civilian workforce is a critical enabler of warfighter readiness, lethality, and capability; both directly, such as medical providers, and indirectly, such as support staff.

#### TOTAL FORCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

48. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, Section 129a of title 10 places the Under Secretary for Defense of Personnel and Readiness (USD (P&R)) in charge of total force management policy. The overarching Department of Defense Instruction 1100.22 for total force management was last updated in 2017. Congress has enacted several changes to section 129a since 2017 and yet the USD (P&R) has not updated Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 1100.22. Additionally, the USD (P&R) has not consistently provided required reports from section 129 and 129a to Congress, particularly related to the Department's projected hiring plans for the DOD

civilian workforce over the Future Year Defense Program. When will the USD (P&R) update these policies and when will it provide these required reports?

Mr. CISNEROS. My office will be issuing a memorandum to provide guidance for the Department on the recent changes to section 129a. In addition, Department of Defense Instruction 1100.22 is currently under review and an approach is being developed for the best way to update it to reflect these and other statutory changes.

The annual report required by section 129 on the civilian workforce has been submitted as part of the Defense Manpower Profile Report (DMPR) (previously the Defense Manpower Requirement Report) since fiscal year 2018. The Department will continue to meet this annual requirement, and this year's DMPR is currently being compiled and will be transmitted no later than August 15, 2023.

#### CONTRACT SERVICES

49. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, there are concerns that the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller), Director of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation (CAPE), Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment have not updated the two Defense Business Board Slides showing the comparative spending on contract services and corresponding estimated contract full time equivalents done in 2017 to reflect spending through 2022 for the Department overall with each Military Department doing the same for the Army, Navy, Air Force, Space Force and Marine Corps. Please provide updated information for 2022.

Mr. CISNEROS. Costing and CFTE data is not yet available for fiscal year 2022, but will be available in the annual submission of the Inventory of Contracts for Services provided by the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition and Sustainment).

50. Senator WARREN. Under Secretary Cisneros, you were required to submit a budget exhibit for services contracts in compliance with section 4506 of title 10 with the President's budget. Please provide a copy of that exhibit.

Mr. CISNEROS. Section 4506 requires the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) and the Director, Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation, to submit this information. While I defer to my colleagues on the contents of this budget exhibit, my understanding is that this reporting requirement will be met with a chapter in the fiscal year 2024 Defense Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Overview Book. The Defense O&M Overview Book will be provided to Congress by early May 2023, and will be included in subsequent annual President's Budget submissions.

---

#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR MAZIE HIRONO

##### OCOLA CUTS IN HAWAII

51. Senator HIRONO. Mr. Cisneros, My office has heard from our Servicemembers in Hawaii that they are deeply concerned about imminent cuts to their cost of living allowance by around 50 percent, a concern I share. Hawaii has the most expensive cost of living of any State in the country. As we continue to combat inflation, the thought of slashing the cost of living allowance for servicemembers in Hawaii is absurd. Does the Department of Defense have information suggesting the cost of living has fallen by 50 percent in Hawaii?

Mr. CISNEROS. The Overseas Cost-of-Living Allowance (OCOLA) program is designed to supplement the pay of servicemembers assigned outside the continental U.S. (OCONUS) to maintain an equivalent level of purchasing power as their CONUS counterparts-not less purchasing power, but not more either.

Every year, the Department assesses the cost of living in overseas locations, including Hawaii, by comparing shopping pattern (a Living Pattern Survey depicting servicemembers' aggregate shopping patterns) and price data (a Retail Price Schedule capturing prices of a market basket of non-housing goods and services collected) to the same data collected across CONUS (the average CONUS baseline). A comparison of cost-of-living data Hawaii submitted at the end of 2022, to the same data collected CONUS resulted in an OCOLA rate of 108 for Oahu, indicating it is 8 percent more expensive, on average, to purchase non-housing goods and services in Oahu than in CONUS. This is, however, a calculated downward adjustment of 8 index points from the 2021 Oahu OCOLA index of 116. This decrease does not indicate Hawaii's cost of living has fallen by 50 percent; instead, it illuminates the effects of high U.S. inflation over the past year. Significant price increases in the average CONUS baseline, not matched or exceeded by price increases in Hawaii, re-

sulted in a smaller differential in the cost comparison and a lower OCOLA rate for Oahu and other islands in Hawaii.

The Department, with the help of Congress, has taken action to combat the effects of inflation on the finances of servicemembers and their families through other pay and allowances (e.g., servicemembers received a 4.6 percent increase in basic pay, an 11.2 percent increase in basic allowance for subsistence, and an average 12.1 percent increase in the basic allowance for housing). Even with the computed OCOLA decrease, many members receive more pay now than they did in 2022 due to these increases. For example, an E-6 with 10 years of service and three dependents, stationed on Oahu, received a net pay increase of approximately \$538 per month.

Additionally, on December 8, 2022, Secretary Austin paused OCOLA rate decreases resulting from cost-of-living data. That pause remains in effect as the Department works to implement the provisions of the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 that affect the DOD's OCOLA program.

52. Senator HIRONO. Mr. Cisneros, if not, how does DOD justify cutting the Cost of Living Allowance for our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Guardians, and Marines in what is far and away the most expensive State in America?

Mr. CISNEROS. Although it may seem counterintuitive that OCOLA would decrease during a time of high inflation, the foundation of the OCOLA program is to maintain economic parity between servicemembers stationed CONUS and OCONUS. Data indicating that CONUS inflation increased at a greater rate than inflation in Hawaii over the past year warrants the adjustment to the OCOLA rate for members stationed in Hawaii. While I understand OCOLA decreases are not desired, the changes calculated for Hawaii are data-driven decisions; they are consistent with the policies and practices governing the OCOLA program and used to compute OCOLA for over 600 OCONUS locations, and they are consistent with changes computed for OCONUS installations worldwide due to continued high CONUS inflation.

#### FAMILY PLANNING AND HEALTH IN THE MILITARY

53. Senator HIRONO. Mr. Cisneros and Mr. Constable, what is the importance of the Department of Defense's new policies to Ensure Access to Reproductive Health Care for our servicemembers?

Mr. CISNEROS and Mr. CONSTABLE. These policies reinforce the Secretary's commitment to taking care of our people protecting their health and well-being, and ensuring the force remains ready and resilient.

As of March 2023, servicemembers are afforded the option—similar to their civilian counterparts—of having up to 20 weeks before they are required to notify their commanders of pregnancy, except in certain circumstances in which earlier notification is necessary based upon individual circumstances of the servicemember and mission requirements. This provides servicemembers the time and flexibility to make personal health care decisions. Servicemembers and eligible dependents may also use an administrative absence and travel allowance to access assisted reproductive technology to help them in building a family.

The new policies will help servicemembers access lawfully available non-covered reproductive health care or accompany a dependent to access lawfully available non-covered reproductive health care, regardless of whether they are stationed inside or outside the United States.

Due to the nature of military service, servicemembers do not choose where they are stationed or assigned. The policies on administrative absence and travel allowances for non-covered reproductive health care ensure access to reproductive health care irrespective of a servicemember's duty station or assignment. To mitigate the impact of certain assignment locations, servicemembers are authorized several allowances, benefits, and entitlements based on their geographic location. Examples of other allowances, benefits, and entitlements servicemembers are authorized based on duty station or assignment location include remote and austere conditions assignment incentive pay, cold weather duty, authorization of assignment or special duty pay, continuous overseas tour travel entitlement, environmental morale leave, basic housing allowances, cost of living allowances, and dependent student travel, among others. All these policies are intended to increase the emotional and physical well-being of all servicemembers and their families.

The efforts taken by the Department on reproductive health care will not only ensure servicemembers and their families are afforded the time and flexibility to make private health care decisions but will also ensure servicemembers are able to access non-covered reproductive health care regardless of their duty station. These policies

reflect and reinforce our commitment to taking care of our people and ensuring the entire force remains ready and resilient.

54. Senator HIRONO. Mr. Cisneros and Mr. Constable, cryopreservation is a fertility tool that Servicemembers could use if they wish to have children in the future. What impact would covering the cost of cryopreservation under TRICARE—much like the British Armed Forces does for their Servicemembers—have on recruitment and retention rates?

Mr. CISNEROS and Mr. CONSTABLE. Issues of fertility and pregnancy can be central to career trajectories and retention for servicemembers. This is particularly true for Service women, who often serve during their potential childbearing years and may delay starting a family to meet their military career goals. Facilitating access to cryopreservation promotes readiness and retention and offers servicemembers a critical tool to meet their family planning needs.

We do not have data on how cryopreservation would impact recruiting and retention rates as such a procedure would not be considered a recruiting or retention incentive in the traditional sense.

#### BETTER COUNTERING TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

55. Senator HIRONO. Mr. Cisneros, human trafficking, and particularly sex trafficking of underage women and girls, is of great concern to me. In Hawaii a commission on Missing and Murdered Native Hawaiian Women has identified a potential correlation between the number of military members in Hawaii and some of the trafficking occurring in Hawaii; but there is not currently any data to support or disprove the theory because this issue has not been studied. That is why I am working to include language in this year's NDAA to call for a study on trafficking and requesting more effective training and education on how soliciting prostitution impacts sex trafficking. What does the Department of Defense do currently to combat trafficking in persons?

Mr. CISNEROS. The Department makes clear in our Combating Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 2200.01, "It is DOD policy to oppose prostitution, forced labor, and any related activities contributing to the phenomenon of trafficking in persons (TIP). CTIP will be applied across the entire spectrum of DOD missions, functions, programs, and activities."

The CTIP DODI establishes policy, assigns responsibilities, and prescribes training requirements for CTIP and implements National Security Presidential Directive-22. The DODI requires the Secretaries of the Military Departments to identify commercial establishments patronized by DOD personnel that have indicators of Trafficking in Persons (TIP), place offending establishments off-limits, and provide support to host-country authorities involved in the battle against TIP, as permitted.

In 2005, the DOD added a statute to the Uniform Code of Military Justice prohibiting the purchase of sex and implemented the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act giving commanders a method to charge civilians that commit a felony (including human trafficking) while accompanying troops overseas.

CTIP training is mandated for all DOD military and civilian personnel during their initial year of entry into the DOD. In addition, specialized training is required for DOD Investigative personnel, Acquisition Personnel, DOD Education Activity staff, and as a CTIP resource for DOD Leaders.

CTIP training defines Trafficking in Persons (TIP), avenues to report TIP, resources for those affected by TIP, and make clear the consequences and legal ramifications for those who engage in this heinous crime. DOD components are required to submit an annual CTIP self-assessment that includes reporting on suspected TIP incidents, TIP investigations, TIP prosecutions, TIP indictments, TIP convictions and training programs. Our Military Criminal Investigative Organizations (MCIOs) partner with local, State, and Federal law enforcement agencies to combat human trafficking and child exploitation.

Example in Hawaii—our Army Criminal Investigative Division, Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and Air Force Office of Special Investigations are members of the Honolulu County Human Trafficking Task Force, comprised of the State Attorney General's Office, Hawaii State Prosecutor's Office, Honolulu Police Department, Homeland Security Investigations.

The DOD established a DOD-wide Combating Trafficking in Persons Task Force with 50+ points of contact throughout the Department to create an "in-reach" infrastructure for assisting components in preventing human trafficking.

56. Senator HIRONO. Mr. Cisneros, what do you see as potential areas of improvement for the Department of Defense to better prevent these crimes and protect the communities in which the DOD serves?

Mr. CISNEROS. One of my priorities is to Change the Culture. P&R is working to do that by promoting military readiness and by decreasing the prevalence of readiness-detracting behavior such as human trafficking.

Another priority is leadership involvement. Leaders are the key to improving CTIP and community relationships. Having a robust and effective awareness campaign is one way the DOD can work to prevent TIP and protect the communities around U.S. military installations.

A third priority is to continue to expand the specialized CTIP trainings for personnel. In the coming months, the CTIP office will release a specialized training for the DOD Healthcare professionals and a separate training for the DOD Chaplain Corps. Both of these trainings will help the healthcare workforce and the Chaplains to recognize TIP in their respective work environments and to help protect victims and survivors with whom they may interact or encounter in their duties.

#### SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE MILITARY

57. Senator HIRONO. Mr. Cisneros, last year marked significant changes to the way crimes of sexual assault are investigated, but there is clearly still more to do to prevent these crimes from even happening across the Department of Defense. Particularly alarming is last week's report that showed reported sexual assaults at our military academies increased by 18 percent last year. One in five female students reported they had experienced unwanted sexual contact; this is unacceptable. How do you intend to curb sexual assault and harassment at our Nation's Military Service Academies?

Mr. CISNEROS. Preventing sexual assault remains one of the Department's highest priorities, and this year's survey results underscore the importance of implementing improvements recommended by the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military.

The unprecedented attention, focus, and resourcing delivered by this Administration to counter sexual assault within the Armed Forces include initiatives to reform Academy programs. However, we have more work to do to prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment at our MSAs.

We are taking immediate measures to address sexual assault and sexual harassment at our MSAs.

The Department sent teams of experts to assist the Academies' prevention efforts. Specifically, fiscal year 2023 On-Site Installation Evaluations (OSIE) included visits to all three Academies. OSIE visits to the MSAs are providing immediate insights to address climate challenges and enhance prevention activities.

In addition, leaders at all levels are responsible for championing healthy climates within their organization. DOD fundamentally changed its climate assessment process to better detect risk and protective factors known to be associated with the prevention of readiness impacting behaviors like sexual assault. The command climate assessment process has been updated to provide timely data to empower leadership in addressing the safety and welfare of all unit members. The Academies must now integrate this climate assessment process into their operations as a means to identify cadet and midshipman units with promising climates, as well as those at risk for problems.

There is no single solution to the problem of sexual assault. However, the military justice reforms, prevention initiatives, and survivor care enhancements we have underway are the solution set for the academies and for the rest of the Total Force. We must redouble our efforts to implement these important initiatives.

58. Senator HIRONO. Mr. Cisneros, what impact do these crimes have on our military's recruitment and retention efforts?

Mr. CISNEROS. Survey of youth results indicate that possibility of Sexual Harassment/Assault is a concern of youth considering Military Service. Furthermore, female youths are more likely to believe the risks of serving outweigh the benefits (64 percent versus 51 percent), and in recent years, the perceived risk of sexual assault/sexual harassment has risen to the fifth ranked reason they would not consider military service. As such, our efforts to foster positive change across harmful behaviors is critical to both our recruiting and retention efforts.

#### PUBLIC SHIPYARD WORK FORCE DEVELOPMENT

59. Senator HIRONO. Mr. Cisneros, the President's budget includes significant investments in workforce development for the private submarine shipyards, but unfor-

unately does not match that investment for our Nation's public yards. These public shipyards, like the one at Pearl Harbor, are vitally important for the readiness of our undersea force, and they too are facing challenges recruiting and retaining skilled labor to keep up with growing demand. What steps is the Department taking to increase the competitiveness of jobs at our public shipyards?

Mr. CISNEROS. The Department is reviewing data for possible submissions of special salary rates for General Schedule and Federal Wage System positions at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and Guam Detachment, seeking to increase wages and salaries, as warranted. Special salary rates are being considered on a case-by-case basis to address staffing difficulties for certain positions at these locations. The Department of the Navy is also canvassing its major commands in other geographic areas for potential special salary rate coverage. OPM is the approving authority for both General Schedule and Federal Wage System requests.

60. Senator HIRONO. Mr. Cisneros, what steps is the Department taking to improve recruitment efforts for our public shipyards?

Mr. CISNEROS. TRICARE The Department is marshalling all available resources to improve recruitment efforts at our public shipyards. We are conducting job fairs to reach a broad candidate pool, promoting apprenticeship opportunities, using flexible direct hire authority to appoint qualified candidates, and offering recruitment incentives, special pay setting authority for candidates with superior qualifications, and advancing leave, when applicable, to mitigate recruitment challenges. In addition, we are seeking special salary rates for shipyards in certain geographic areas to offer more competitive pay within labor markets.

#### DEFENSE CIVILIAN TRAINING CORPS

61. Senator HIRONO. Mr. Cisneros, the Defense Civilian Training Corps was stood up as a result of the Fiscal Year 2020 NDAA to create a pipeline of graduates to enter the civil service to fill "critical skills gaps" and was again funded significantly last year. As the Department of Defense works to quickly field innovative systems while ensuring the taxpayer gets the most value for their money this program is more important than ever. What is the current status of the Defense Civilian Training Corps?

Mr. CISNEROS. TRICARE In coordination with my office, the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment is developing and leading effort to research, model, and pilot the Defense Civilian Training Corps (DCTC) for the Department. As also required by statute, the Acquisition Innovation Research Center is partnering within the academic community and pilot universities to initiate a pathway for students to enter the DOD workforce. Much work remains and we will learn from our pilot activities this year. We look forward to demonstrating a DCTC model for the future DOD civilian workforce in fiscal year 2024.

62. Senator HIRONO. Mr. Cisneros, what do you see as the importance of a robust civilian training pipeline?

Mr. CISNEROS. A robust civilian training pipeline is critical to DOD's continued readiness and its ability to meet global security challenges. The Department must ensure it has effective and efficient systems, processes, and policies in place to attract, grow, and maintain the critical skills needed to support our current and future mission, and must do so within an increasingly competitive global talent market. The Defense Business Board just released its full report on this topic on March 30, 2023. The Department is reviewing the report recommendations for implementation, as appropriate.

#### DOD PREGNANCY POLICY STANDARDIZATION

63. Senator HIRONO. Dr. Schaefer, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Wagner, Secretary Austin recently released a significant and important change to the Military's Parental Leave policy. Nonetheless, I am concerned the language in the Military Parental Leave Program allows a level of ambiguity that could be used to deny convalescent leave to the detriment of birth parents, their children, and military readiness. Are your Services committed to giving our Servicemembers the full amount of convalescent leave they require, in addition to their Parental leave?

Assistant Secretary SCHAEFER. Yes, the Army's Military Parental Leave policy emphasizes the 12 weeks of parental leave for the birth parent is in addition to and following a period of maternity convalescent leave. Maternity convalescent leave is authorized for the recovery of the birth parent from giving birth when recommended by the health care provider and approved by the unit commander.

Mr. PARKER. The Department of the Navy recognizes that ensuring Sailors and Marines have adequate time to recover following childbirth is critical to individual medical readiness and overall well-being.

In line with Directive-type Memorandum (DTM) 23-001, "Expansion of the Military Parental Leave Program," and Section 701 of Title 10, United States Code, the Navy and Marine Corps issued guidance that directed convalescent leave may be authorized for the recovery of the servicemember following giving birth if such leave is specifically recommended, in writing, by the health care provider for the servicemember and is approved by the servicemember's unit commander. This is in addition to the authorized parental leave.

Mr. WAGNER. The DAF is committed to and strictly adheres to Title 10, Section 701(h)(3) which authorizes medical convalescent leave in conjunction with the birth if specifically recommended, in writing, by the medical provider of the member to address a diagnosed medical condition and approved by the member's commander. Our new parental leave policy ensures that parental leave begins consecutively, once convalescent leave expires.

64. Senator HIRONO. Dr. Schaefer, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Wagner, have your services discussed with the Office of the Secretary of Defense a need to standardize the convalescent leave policy for new parents across the Services?

Assistant Secretary SCHAEFER. The Army is always looking for ways to better support our Soldiers and families. It's vitally important that the Army appropriately align our policies with OSD and the other Services, consistent with title 10, United States Code for the provision of convalescent leave.

Mr. PARKER. In accordance with DOD policy and Section 701 of Title 10, United States Code, Navy and Marine Corps policies directed that convalescent leave is authorized, prior to the start of parental leave, for the recovery of the servicemember from giving birth if such leave is specifically recommended, in writing, by the health care provider and is approved by the servicemember's unit commander. The duration of convalescent leave is dependent on the individual medical needs of the servicemember; the health care provider tailors convalescent leave recommendations based upon such individual circumstances.

OSD, in coordination with the Services, issued Secretary of Defense memo of March 22, 2023 directing actions across the Services to strengthen support to servicemembers and military families. One of the actions is to educate and promote the new expanded military parental leave benefit.

Mr. WAGNER. Yes; the DAF requested to standardize the amount of convalescent leave during service coordination of the DODI; however, the comment was rejected to align with other types of convalescent leave, which are not standardized in policy. Convalescent leave for any medical condition, including pregnancy, is limited to the minimal time essential to meet medical needs for recuperation.

#### CHILDCARE IN THE MILITARY

65. Senator HIRONO. Dr. Schaefer, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Wagner, we must make it easier for our Servicemembers to have families, whenever and however they choose to. These efforts to improve quality of life for our servicemembers bolster recruitment and retention. But, as you each note in your prepared testimony, a challenging barrier for our military families is a lack of childcare resources. How have previous investments, like the Army's new childcare center in Hawaii, benefited our military families and where have you identified places for additional investment?

Assistant Secretary SCHAEFER. Previous childcare infrastructure investments benefited our families by increasing overall childcare capacity and availability. Today, ongoing staffing challenges continue to impact/limit childcare availability at some locations, so in addition to investing and sustaining infrastructure and off-post options, we will continue to provide incentives to hire and retain quality staff.

Mr. PARKER. The Department of the Navy (DON) is addressing overall child care wait list challenges by increasing installation-based capacities and through multiple initiatives focusing on employee recruiting/retention. Readily available child care helps working parents better navigate life's stressors and reduces negative outcomes for families.

To expand capacity the DON has a number of Military Construction (MILCON) projects in place, mainly in fleet concentration areas where demand for child care exceeds current capacity. We thank Congress for the planning and development funds as well as for their assistance with funding projects on the Unfunded Priority List.

- Fiscal year 2021—Naval Base (NAVBASE) Kitsap, Washington
- Fiscal year 2020—Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, California

- Fiscal year 2023—NAVBASE Point Loma, California
- Fiscal year 2023—Marine Corps Base (MCB) Camp Pendleton, California
- Fiscal year 2024—Naval Support Activity (NSA) Hampton Roads, Virginia
- Fiscal year 2024—Joint Base Little Creek—Fort Story, Virginia
- Fiscal year 2024—NSA Anderson Air Force Base, Guam
- Fiscal year 2025—MCB Quantico, Virginia

Planning is underway for additional child development centers in Hawaii, Virginia, Washington DC, California and Okinawa, Japan to continue to meet demand in fleet concentration areas.

New facilities require increased staff. As I have previously mentioned, child care staffing is a national challenge. To address this problem we have increased hourly wages from -\$11.50 per hour to \$17.39 per hour, beyond the federally mandated \$15.00 per hour and in some locations are offering recruitment and retention bonuses.

The U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps are actively participating in the Deputy Secretary of Defense-directed Recruitment, Retention, and Compensation Task Force with OSD and the Sister Services to solve the problem.

Mr. WAGNER. Previous DAF investments have benefited military families by continuing to provide safe and high-quality childcare centers through Facility Sustainment, Restoration and Modernization (FSRM) projects, encompassing a broad array of facility mechanical and utility systems and maintaining facility conditions as well as increasing childcare capacity through classroom additions. The DAF is now focused on addressing childcare capacity concerns through Military Construction (MILCON) projects. Since fiscal year 2019, ten MILCON projects have been authorized for Joint Base Andrews, Osan Air Base, Sheppard AFB, JBSA-Lackland/Ft. Sam/Randolph, Wright-Patterson AFB, RAF Lakenheath, and Scott AFB. An additional 12 MILCON requirements have been identified and are in planning for Hanscom AFB, Barksdale AFB, Mountain Home AFB, Luke AFB, Nellis AFB, JBSA-Randolph, Travis AFB, Kirtland AFB, Seymour Johnson AFB, Little Rock AFB, Tinker AFB, and Eglin AFB.

66. Senator HIRONO. Dr. Schaefer, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Wagner, beyond building new Child Development Centers what else can your Services and Congress do to make having a family easier in the military?

Ms. SCHAEFER. Besides building additional childcare infrastructure, we will continue to sustain existing centers, incentivize Family childcare, provide Army Fee Assistance for off post care, implement recruiting and retention initiatives to hire and retain quality staff, and explore new initiatives and partnerships.

Mr. PARKER. Families are an integral part of the team and a vital contributor to mission success deserving of our full support. The professionals at Fleet and Family Support Centers and Marine Corps Community Services are committed to delivering outstanding services and support that are dedicated to the health, educational growth, and well-being of our families.

Fleet and Family Readiness and Marine Corps Community Services offices offer programs and services to support military spouses and families. They provide information and referrals to educational workshops and services ranging from long term financial planning to short term needs such as resume writing assistance. Additional resources include Ombudsmen, Family Readiness Officers, and in-house clinical counseling services.

The Department of the Navy is committed to making its quality of life programs and Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) programs affordable and accessible. These programs are integral to the health and wellness of family members and are important to resilience and coping with the demands of the military lifestyle.

Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programs offer a variety of programs and activities to develop new skills, build strength, and reduce stress. They offer programs and activities at a discount to help stretch incomes and still have a rewarding family vacation or weekend outing.

These programs directly support mission readiness by preparing servicemembers and their families for the unique demands of military life. The Navy released the MyNavy Family mobile application, a single source of information for all support and educational resources that are available to servicemembers, their spouses, and families. The Marine Corps recently updated their web site platform to create a user friendly experience and consistency across the enterprise.

It is critical that we continue to support these programs and encourage changes and improvements so that they remain responsive and relevant to servicemembers and families of today and the future.

Mr. WAGNER. DAF efforts to improve access to childcare include staffing initiatives for our Child Development Centers and School Age Care facilities, adding Family Child Care (FCC) providers, and increasing community-based childcare fee assistance.

Recruitment and retention incentives were deployed in 2022 to improve staffing levels and included bonuses for sign-on, employee referrals, meeting training targets, and longevity.

DAF implemented a 100 percent childcare fee discount on 1 October 2022 for all child and youth program direct care staff for their first child enrolled; additional children and other child and youth employees receive a 25 percent discount. As a result of these initiatives, we are pleased that overall direct care staffing levels increased from 65 percent in July 2022 to 75 percent in March 2023.

The FCC program provides care to fit various work schedules, deployment, or other unique childcare needs. Targeted FCC provider recruitment and retention incentives were deployed to increase childcare options and spaces, including an increase in weekly and hourly subsidy rates, financial incentives at the time of initial FCC certification and annual renewal, and an increased subsidy for care provided between 1800 and 0600. These efforts increased FCC providers providing childcare services across the DAF from 331 providers in fiscal year 2021 to 381 providers at the end of fiscal year 2022.

Access to community-based childcare fee assistance for military families not living near a military installation or unable to access on-base programs was enhanced in 2022 when DAF updated the MilitaryChildCare.com site to allow families to submit and manage their requests for fee assistance, providing a one-stop platform for childcare requests for childcare on and off the installation. We realize, however, that there is still unmet need, and we are committed to continued innovation to ensure readiness.

67. Senator HIRONO. Dr. Schaefer, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Wagner, where are each of your services in the process of standardizing the Exceptional Family Member Program and ensuring the needs of our Military families are fully met in this area?

Ms. SCHAEFER. This past year, the Army developed and launched an integrated Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) system that streamlines enrollment, provides transparency, and synchronizes assignment coordination and Family support access. Additionally, the Army is establishing a centralized office at Headquarters Department of the Army to oversee the EFMP with a goal to be fully operational by the end of the year.

Mr. PARKER. The Department of the Navy (DON) is committed to supporting and providing the necessary resources to our families enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP). The DON continues to collaborate with our Sister Service colleagues and the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness) (OUSD(P&R)) on standardization efforts and processes to ease the burden on our families.

The Marine Corps Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) is compliant with the requirement for a central office. A single EFMP office that reports to the Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs is responsible for program oversight of enrollment, family support, and assignment coordination. The program employs 107 personnel to support 210,700 enrolled family members.

The Navy has implemented the initial phase to establish the central office under Navy Personnel Command. The office will unify enrollment, assignment coordination, and family support. The Navy has added 55 installation family support case liaisons in Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023. The program employs 138 personnel to support 23,500 enrolled family members.

The Service central offices along with the increased case liaison personnel ratio will improve both the identification and enrollment experience for families and also improve continuity of services at the new permanent duty station. The Navy and Marine Corps are implementing the respite care standardized guidelines which will expand eligibility criteria and increase hours of care for some families.

Both Services provide legal assistance to families when additional educational support is required. The Marine Corps has four attorneys (Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Marine Corps Base Quantico, Camp Lejeune and Camp Pendleton) who are trained in special education law. The Navy has two attorneys (Naval Station Norfolk and Naval Base San Diego) and the Navy Judge Advocate General's office is working to expand legal services, in particular to the Northwest (Washington), Southeast (Florida), Washington Navy District (DC), and Great Lakes regions.

Mr. WAGNER. Over the last 2 years, the DAF has made significant improvements to EFMP and efforts to improve the support and services provided to military families with special needs continues to be a priority. DAF EFMP transformation is ap-

proximately 70 percent complete in our multi-year journey. Centralization, process improvement and major automation efforts streamlined processes, reduced timelines, and increased access to information and services for our families. For example, the focus on the DAF EFMP Central Cell human capital strategy led to filling 67 critical positions and the processing time for final determinations for our families decreased by more than half as compared to this time last year.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION IN THE MILITARY

68. Senator HIRONO. Dr. Schaefer, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Wagner, the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee, which was stood up by Secretary of Defense Austin, completed its comprehensive review in January, 2023 and detailed over 120 recommendations. The Fiscal Year 2024 President's Budget includes about \$209 million to begin implementation of these recommendations. Will all of the recommendations in the report be implemented by your services?

Ms. SCHAEFER. The Army is committed to reducing suicides and recognizes the importance of the recommendations made by the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee (SPRIRC). The Army is an Active member of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness led SPRIRC Implementation Working Group. This working group is using a collaborative and systematic approach to assess the viability and advisability of the SPRIRC's recommendations. Per the SECDEF's guidance, this group will provide a recommended implementation approach by 2 June. Working with our DOD partners, the Army has provided critical input and guidance on implementation approaches. While implementing the recommendations will take time, the Army understands the long-term benefits they will bring to improve the quality of life and public health approaches to reduce suicides.

Mr. PARKER. The Department of Defense released a report in February 2023 following the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Commission (SPRIRC) comprehensive review. The report issued 127 recommendations for "Preventing Suicide in the Military" to the Military Departments (MLDEPs).

Upon receipt of the SPRIRC, the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) directed the immediate implementation of several recommendations addressing servicemembers' well-being, access to behavioral and mental healthcare, and the establishment of a Suicide Prevention Implementation Working Group. This working group serves as the primary body to assess the advisability and feasibility of implementing each of the remaining recommendations.

Mr. WAGNER. USD(P&R) swiftly established a Suicide Prevention Implementation Working Group as the primary body to assess the advisability and feasibility of implementing each of the recommendations. The working group identified specific policy and program changes needed to implement each recommendation and provided cost and manpower estimates to implement each of the recommendations. The Secretary of Defense will receive the internal assessment in June 2023. The DAF will continue to support all OSD-level implementation efforts.

*Additional information regarding AF/SG implementation activities.*

The DAF has already moved forward with utilization of behavioral health technicians as behavioral health care extenders. The 4C Career Field Manager (CFM) makes this a routine topic of focus for with Flight leadership when she visits DAF installations. The CFM and her staff also regularly advise Mental Health (MH) enlisted leadership on how to expand utilization of the technicians as provider extenders. The 2023 Mental Health Flight Leadership conference is devoting a full workshop on how to use the MH technicians as provider extenders. Limited administrative support to the clinics and lack of MH case managers impedes our teams' ability to fully maximize the capabilities of our MH technicians.

Military Treatment Facilities on DAF installations already implement episodes of care scheduling within behavioral health clinics. IAW AFI 44-172, the MH clinics already ensure individuals deemed high risk are seen weekly. Their treatment is carefully tracked and monitored, and a multi-disciplinary team of MH professionals meet regularly to discuss the patients' progress and determine if modifications to treatment plans are needed. Additionally, the success of our Targeted Care program, which is designed to connect individuals to the most appropriate resource (e.g., Mental Health, Primary Care Behavioral Health, Military Family Life Consultant, Military One Source, Chaplains) given their respective needs, has resulted in more availability within the MH clinics. This has enabled many of our MH clinics to see patients needing that level of care for follow ups at the frequency indicated given their MH conditions.

DAF (MH) has already been routinely promoting skills-based suicide prevention training for our MH teams. There has been a concerted effort to get providers enrolled in the Psychological Health Centers of Excellence (PHCOE) training on Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Suicide Prevention (CBT-SP). In May 2022, SG 3/4 sent out a transmittal encouraging MH teams to complete training on Lethal Means Safety (LMS). That course was offered via computer-based training free of charge from our VA counterparts.

69. Senator HIRONO. Dr. Schaefer, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Wagner, how are each of your Services prioritizing the implementation of these recommendations and do you have an estimated timeline for their completion?

Ms. SCHAEFER. The Army is actively assessing the implementation of the recommendations made by the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee, which will be done through a phased approach, synchronized with the establishment of a prevention workforce at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. To expedite the immediate action of sleep education, the Army will utilize existing prevention capabilities such as the Holistic Health and Fitness program. Additionally, the Army is in the process of Army-wide proliferation of a newly modernized Suicide Prevention training curriculum, which equips Commanders with tools to impart knowledge and skills through modular means in accordance with SPRIRC recommendations for frequency, intensity, and duration of education delivery. Furthermore, the Army recognizes the importance of leaders who steward our most valuable asset—People—and is currently reviewing and assessing the Commanders Assessment Program.

Mr. PARKER. The Department of Defense released a report in February 2023 following the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Commission (SPRIRC) comprehensive review. The report issued 127 recommendations for “Preventing Suicide in the Military.”

Upon receipt of the SPRIRC, the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) directed the immediate implementation of several recommendations addressing servicemembers well-being, access to behavioral and mental healthcare, and the establishment of a Suicide Prevention Implementation Working Group. This working group serves as the primary body to assess the advisability and feasibility of implementing each of the remaining recommendations.

The Department of the Navy (DON) is committed to reducing suicide of its Sailors, Marines, Civilians, and family members. The DON, Navy and Marine Corps are active participants in the working group reviewing the recommendations, drafting initial implementation plans, prioritizing recommendations, and identifying barriers that may impact implementation. A final plan from the Suicide Prevention Implementation Working Group is due to SECDEF in June 2023. The DON, Navy and Marine Corps expect additional guidance concerning the implementation of the remaining recommendations after his review of the proposed Implementation Plan.

Mr. WAGNER. The DAF is working as part of OSD(P&R)’s SPRIRC Implementation working group to focus on each recommendation. The DAF’s efforts align with OSD’s prioritization level of effort toward implementing the recommendations from the SPRIRC report. The Secretary of Defense will receive the internal assessment in June 2023. DAF implementation plans and completion timelines will be established after the approvals by SECDEF.

#### GENDER INTEGRATION IN THE MARINE CORPS

70. Senator HIRONO. Mr. Parker, the Fiscal Year 2020 NDAA included a requirement for the Marine Corps to integrate the genders during all recruit training—with a 5-year deadline to do so at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, South Carolina, and an 8-year deadline at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. What is the current status update on how recruit gender integration in the Marine Corps is proceeding?

Mr. PARKER. We have been fulfilling the fiscal year 2020 NDAA requirement by executing our integrated training model at both recruit depots since the beginning of 2021. MCRD Parris Island is fully in compliance and MCRD San Diego is on track to meet the requirement as directed. Currently, there are no impediments to our gender integration efforts. By 2026 we expect to have an equal distribution of female recruits at both depots. Today, every female recruit, at both MCRDs, trains alongside her male counterpart in integrated companies.

71. Senator HIRONO. Mr. Parker, how are the units with full gender integration performing compared to the all-male or all-female units?

Mr. PARKER. In evaluated individual events (e.g., physical fitness tests, combat fitness tests, and rifle range), we see no discernable difference in the total average scores of integrated companies in comparison to all-male or all-female companies. We will continue to train to standard in our integrated company model and will continue to monitor recruit performance.

#### DIVERSITY EFFORTS

72. Senator HIRONO. Dr. Schaefer, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Wagner, diversity in race, gender, socio-economic background, and ideas contributes to a stronger, more innovative military. In today's challenging recruiting environment, it is more important than ever for everyone who meets the military's standards to have the opportunity to serve. How are each of your services reducing barriers to accession for all people and informing young people about the benefits of service?

Dr. SCHAEFER. The Army continues to proactively work with OSD to look to expand upon the traditional standards of qualification to allow propensed applicants the opportunity to serve.

We continue working to tell the Army's story in new ways to ensure we remain a top choice for Americans who want to serve their country. One example of this outreach is the U.S. Army Recruiting Command's (USAREC) Diversity Outreach and Inclusion Team (DOIT), which engages and shares real life Army stories from team members in order to connect with diverse audiences and communities on a personal level. DOIT is comprised of Officers/Noncommissioned Officers from Active Duty and Active Guard Reserve with diverse backgrounds and experiences who are uniquely equipped to provide relatable information to potential applicants, influencers, and community leaders.

We will continue to reach out to Americans from all backgrounds, talents, and regions and give them multiple reasons to come in and stay in our great Army. Our goal is to help all Americans to be able to see themselves in what the Army has to offer.

Mr. PARKER. High schools are the best sustainable market for our recruiters, and the best way we can share the Navy and Marine Corps story and the benefits of service. We are continuing to renew our community and school outreach efforts after the COVID-19 pandemic and working closely with the Department of Education to connect with local, State and Federal education officials to promote the value of military service. Ensuring State and local officials facilitate recruiting access is paramount to our success.

The Navy and Marine Corps have both implemented outreach to underrepresented communities as we strive to recruit from every zip code and increase the pool of qualified accessions. We partner with affinity and other influential organizations that can promote our inclusive message of service to all communities, such as minority professional organizations and fraternities and sororities at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). We continue to assess where Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC) units are established and how best to leverage cross-town affiliations at MSIs. Our recruiters also seek diverse and innovative STEM talent from magnet schools, specialized high schools, and career and technical education programs.

In addition to these outreach efforts, both the Navy and Marine Corps have made significant investments in marketing and advertising to increase brand awareness among key influencers, to generate contacts, and to create advocates. Some of the strongest results come from social media (YouTube, Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, etc.) where we can reach a large and diverse population, video views and completions, and media and event impressions.

We are also seeking creative ways to expand the pool of eligible applicants. For example, the Navy launched the Future Sailor Preparatory Course, which provides fitness training to help high-potential recruits meet body composition standards to be eligible to enlist. The Navy is also accepting additional applicants with lower

Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) percentile scores only if they have qualifying line scores for a specific job assignment. This change removes a potential barrier to enlistment that emphasizes the applicant's individual aptitude (as measured by the line score) vice their comparison against others (as measured by the percentile score), and broadens our pool of potential recruits, while still sustaining the specific job qualifications, which is our most applicable requirement. Finally, we are working closely with OSD to review medical standards for enlistment to better reflect modern understanding and treatment of physical and mental health conditions and not unnecessarily disqualify those who are qualified and willing to serve.

Mr. WAGNER. How we take care of, and prioritize, taking care of our Airmen and Guardians and their families, caregivers, and survivors directly impacts our ability

to attract talent. Today's youth are looking for organizations who align with their values, to work somewhere that respects them and everyone around them. Taking care of people reflects how we enhance the quality of life and quality of service of our members.

This is important both to our recruiting messaging, both to recruits themselves, but also youth influencers. It is also important to our retention efforts. With a consistent average of 90 percent retention, we find that once members join the DAF, we are generating a positive environment that ensured they want to stay.

The Secretary of the Air Force directed the Vice Chief of Staff to expedite the process in which we identify and remove barriers to service to increase the qualified pool of applicants without decreasing standards. To date, the team has expedited implementation of a revised tattoo policy allowing for small hand and neck tattoos, modified the strength aptitude test requirements, and aligned the body fat composition standard with the DOD standard. Work continues to promote naturalization at Basic Training, reevaluate driver's license requirements for specific career fields, incentivize recruit referrals and authorize additional stripes for certain education and industry certifications, to include cyber certifications. Additionally, DAF reinstated the Enlisted College Loan Repayment Program and increased the Initial Enlistment Bonus budget for fiscal year 2023. More specifically, the DAF is currently developing/executing a campaign to encourage female participation in sports through direct marketing and athletic partnerships to create an enduring relationship with female athletes and their influencers. The DAF also employs a rigorous data-driven approach to ensure that our marketing tactics and messaging align with Generation Z and their influencers. Compared to fiscal year 2022, these efforts have led to a 3 percent increase in female, Hispanics, and African American recruits year-to-date with a positive trajectory ahead.

73. Senator HIRONO. Dr. Schaefer, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Wagner, the Department of Defense has initiated a number of programs to put Servicemembers and their families first. How have these efforts helped you in your recruiting mission?

Dr. SCHAEFER. The Army believes there is a correlation between how we care for our People and overall recruitment and retention. Investing in programs that put Families first has real life impacts for our soldiers and their families, enhances Army readiness, and shapes public perception. We have confidence these investments posture us to retain current and recruit future soldiers into the Army.

Mr. PARKER. While we have seen many improvements in industry in recent years, from compensation to education benefits, we must continue to emphasize the benefits that set the military apart, especially transformational benefits that only military service can offer. I believe military compensation and education benefits are still largely unrivaled by the private sector, especially for our largest cohort of non-college educated individuals with limited professional experience. Responsive personnel policies and quality of life programs are necessary to ensure the military remains relevant in the minds of today's youth, who have come to expect benefits such as parental leave to be the norm. These policies and programs contribute to positive perceptions of military service among those currently serving and their families. This in turn helps us address misconceptions about military service, which remain a key barrier to recruitment.

Mr. WAGNER. How we take care of, and prioritize taking care of, our Airmen and Guardians' and their families directly impacts our ability to attract talent. Today's youth are looking for organizations that align with their values, to work somewhere that respects them and everyone around them. Taking care of people reflects that we value quality of life and as a balance to the sacrifices of service. When we offer resources for spouses, childcare, health and wellness, financial readiness support, education, health and wellness those programs help counter barriers to service. When we take care of our people, our people can focus on innovating, growing and learning, solving problems, and executing the mission, which also aligns with young Americans' desire for work that is challenging, meaningful, and has a positive impact.

---

#### QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TIM KAINE

##### INTEGRATED DISABILITY EVALUATION SYSTEM

74. Senator KAINE. Secretary Cisneros and Ms. Foster, the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) was determined to be a factor for concern in the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee report that was released in February of this year, noting that in 2012 the average timeline for completion

of evaluations was 400 days. Although the DOD has made progress and the report stated that the Services are close to achieving a completion goal of 180 days, this is a vulnerable population with an increased suicide risk. How is OUSD(P&R) and/or the Office of Force Resiliency working with the Services to incorporate this report's recommendations involving manning and assignment policies and ensuring that servicemembers going through the IDES process are appropriately cared for?

Mr. CISNEROS and Ms. FOSTER. The Secretaries of the Military Departments operate the DOD portions of the Integrated DES (IDES) in accordance with Title 10, U.S.C. One of the primary duties of the Secretaries is to resource and train staff member with appropriate assistance from the Director of the DHA. In April 2020, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) suspended all in-person examinations due to COVID-19 (and continues to be challenged in the examination and rating stages of the IDES), which affected down-the-line DOD timeliness of IDES cases. Our VA partners are rectifying that issue now. The Military Departments, have experienced staff shortages, and gapped assignments of medical officers at the Physical Evaluation Board level (especially in the Department of the Navy). Turnover of well-trained uniformed physicians performing Medical Evaluation Board duties at DHA MTFs has been of issue. These factors have impacted the ability to process servicemembers through the IDES in optimum fashion.

However, the Joint Executive Council (JEC) has been directly involved in assisting the Military Departments mitigate DES staffing challenge. In a recent JEC meeting, this issue was front-and-center, and the Military Departments reported the following organizing actions to improve timeliness and the percentage of cases meeting the goal:

- Prioritizing military and civilian vacancies fill actions to address shortages, to include:
  - Adding additional authorizations to increase capacity/throughput
  - Detailing or overstaffing additional personnel to augment the DES workforce
- Sharing and implementing identified best practices to improve efficiencies
- Emphasizing and implementing Service electronic DES case-processing systems to provide visibility into snags whether DOD or VA

The Department does understand the impact that delayed processes can have on servicemembers and is taking every effort to minimize servicemembers' vulnerability of suicide risk. In particular, policy requires servicemembers undergoing DES evaluation be advised of their case status regularly, issues that must be resolved for their case to progress, and the expected timeframe for completing the DES at their installation. Physical Evaluation Board Liaison Officers help manage expectations, coordinate medical appointments related to the disability process, oversee the servicemember's case file, and are required to contact servicemembers undergoing disability evaluation at least monthly to offer DES case assistance.

While the Department knows of no direct correlation between the Military Department's IDES queue time (and staffing) to suicidal ideations, we recognize that IDES delays could aggravate some servicemembers.

#### DEFENSE HEALTH AGENCY

75. Senator Kaine. Under Secretary Cisneros and Assistant Secretary Martinez-Lopez, I've had several constituents and advocacy groups reach out to me about DOD civilian access to care in Japan—an issue that has both highlighted and added to concerns about the scope of Defense Health Agency's mandate, which seems to focus exclusively on Active Duty servicemembers and dependents. Given that OUSD(P&R) is the principal staff assistant and advisor to SECDEF for Total Force Management, I'm curious why DHA's mandate to "provide a medically ready force" does not seem to extend to the auxiliary forces that support our uniformed servicemembers and the mission. Would you agree that there is a need to reconsider how DHA defines readiness and expand its mandate to ensure the medical readiness of the Total Force?

Mr. CISNEROS. Requirements for "readiness of the force" is in the lane of and identified by the Military Departments. DHA acts on those requirements in MTFs; however, DHA does not define the requirements of readiness.

Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Requirements for "readiness of the force" is in the lane of and identified by the Military Departments. DHA acts on those requirements in MTFs; however, DHA does not define the requirements of readiness.

#### SUPPORT TO NON-DEPLOYABLE SERVICEMEMBERS

76. Senator Kaine. Assistant Secretaries Schaefer, Parker and Wagner, it came to my attention during visits to the Mid-Atlantic Regional Maintenance Center fol-

lowing the suicides of 4 Sailors that a contributing factor to the stressors at the command was a policy that allows for a 60 percent increase in the assignment of personnel (30 percent for limited duty and 30 percent for pregnancy/postpartum) with no additional resources to support a population that requires special care and attention. How do your respective services provide support to those in a limited duty or pregnant/postpartum status and the commands they are assigned to? Separately, how do your respective services do the same for those undergoing a disability evaluation?

Dr. SCHAEFER. The Army supports soldiers in a limited duty or pregnant/postpartum status in several ways. To protect the Soldier, a medical profile is generated that is routed to the Commander for approval and awareness. This ensures the Company Commander is aware of the medically recommended limitations. In the case of a pregnancy, notifications are handled following the Army Directive "Command Notification of Pregnancy" dated February 27, 2023. Additionally, the soldier's chain of command, including the squad leader and company command team, look out for the soldier and may arrange assistance if required. The service provides support to the commands through their higher chain of command. This may include clarifying policies and regulations or facilitating additional support if needed. This may also take the form of assisting with a replacement if a Soldier on limited duty fills a key position and cannot deploy or attend a training exercise.

Mr. PARKER. The Navy believes it is critical to support servicemembers to ensure readiness and resilience. Limited duty (LIMDU) places servicemembers into a medically restricted status allowing for recovery and rehabilitation to be their primary focus. Their progression is proactively managed and closely monitored by a multidisciplinary team at Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Commands (NMRTC) through monthly Temporary Limited Duty Operations meetings. Both the NMRTC and the servicemember's command have designated, trained Deployability Coordinators (DC) that meet regularly and have access to the web-based tracking application "LIMDU SMART" to ensure coordination and communication flow effectively between the medical facility managing the LIMDU Sailor and the parent command.

Navy Medicine provides a Women's Health Website that hosts resources for pregnant and postpartum servicemembers and their leadership, including education tools, postpartum return to duty transition guide, nutrition, exercise, and resiliency materials. In addition, the Female Force Readiness Clinical Community provides a platform for women's health leaders and stakeholders to develop strategic initiatives that support the female force across their medical readiness needs including pregnancy, postpartum, mental health, nutrition, musculoskeletal injury and prevention, and more.

For servicemembers going through a disability evaluation, the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) is a collaboration between the Department of the Navy (DON) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that includes medical evaluations from both agencies resulting in both Department of Defense and VA disability rating determinations. The goal of IDES is to close the gap between separation from Active Duty and the receipt of VA benefits and compensation. NMRTC Physical Evaluation Board Liaison Officers and parent command DCs, as discussed in the LIMDU process, support all servicemembers in the IDES, including utilization of monthly touchpoints for coordination of care through the Military Medical Treatment Facility or network care.

Mr. WAGNER. Department of the Air Force Instruction (DAFI) 36-2110, Total Force Assignments, outlines DAF assignment policies. The DAF does not have a policy that increases assignments to affect manning at a location for servicemembers in limited duty or pregnant/postpartum status. However, the DAF has Assignment Limitation policies which alert personnel managers of constraints on utilization, assignment, and deferment of pregnant/postpartum servicemembers. These policies assign codes that limit the selection of Airmen to or from certain duties or areas and may be permanent or semi-permanent in order to protect the servicemember from re-assignment, for instance while on limited duty/pregnancy/postpartum status. Furthermore, current postpartum assignment policy provides deferment and stabilization for up to 12 months after the birth of a child. Waiver authorities exist for these deferments and are assessed on a case-by-case basis and allow accommodations where the risk to health and safety is minimal. On behalf of DAF, the Air Force Personnel Center's assessment is that assignment limitation codes are adequate and provide adequately necessary flexibility for servicemembers and DAF unit-level leadership to ensure the health and safety, and military readiness of the DAF.

When a servicemember has a condition(s), which may make the member "unfit" for continued military service, the member undergoes medical evaluation and may be referred into the Disability Evaluation System (DES). Once referred to the DES, this structured evaluation process (AFI 36-3212) takes approximately 180 days from

initial treatment / medical assessment through the formal evaluation boards to the transition to veteran status. This process also determines any disability rating and post-service VA benefits. Each servicemember is assigned a Physical Evaluation Board Liaison Officer (PEBLO) who assists the member with the DES process requirements. The PEBLO also communicates with the member's commander and the VA Military Service Coordinator regarding the member's progress through the DES, the final determination, and the transition to the VA. Servicemembers are also entitled to legal representation through the Office of Disability Counsel.

---

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR DAN SULLIVAN

MILITARY FAMILY LIFE COUNSELORS

77. Senator SULLIVAN. Under Secretary Cisneros, Assistant Secretaries Schaefer and Wagner, I am sure you're well aware of the suicide problem within our military and the DOD's recently released report on suicide prevention. Last year, Senator Murkowski and I introduced the Don Young Arctic Warrior Act to alleviate some of the hardships faced by our servicemembers in Alaska. Both the Arctic Warrior Act and the DOD's new study addressed servicemembers' access to counseling services. Right now, Military Family Life Counselors (MFLCs) provide confidential, non-medical counseling to servicemembers and their families but they are limited to doing so only in states where the provider is licensed. MFLCs are in high demand in Alaska so much so that they cannot meet demand. We can ensure more servicemembers and families have access counseling by allowing license reciprocity, which would allow a MFLC licensed in Montana to provide service to servicemembers and families in Alaska. Do you support license reciprocity for MFLCs?

Mr. CISNEROS. It is fundamentally important that servicemembers and families have access to counseling services. I wholeheartedly support solutions to ease access to MFLCs who fill a critical non-medical counseling role.

Dr. SCHAEFER. Yes, the Army supports license reciprocity for Military Family Life Counselors.

Mr. WAGNER. Yes, the DAF supports license reciprocity for MFLCs. MFLCs are highly utilized by the DAF, with over 900 established requirements for adult, child and youth, and school-based programs, as a first-line of engagement for our Airmen, Guardians, and families.

RECRUITING VETERANS

78. Senator SULLIVAN. Mr. Cisneros, Mr. Constable, Mr. Parker, Mr. Wagner, the U.S. military's current recruiting crisis is well-documented, with the Army missing its recruiting goal by 25 percent last year and the other branches barely meeting theirs. The DOD has cited health issues, criminal records, low ASVAB scores, and a lack of interest in military service as some of the recruiting barriers services are currently facing. While I agree that we must work to meet the manpower goals by bringing new recruits into the military, I believe we must also seek to re-engage veterans who have since left the service to bring them back. One program I would like to highlight is the Marine Corps Reserve's new Marine Innovation Unit, which has successfully recruited veterans with strong consulting, technology, venture capital, and startup backgrounds back to the service in a reserve capacity to work on some of the Marine Corps' toughest problems. Do you think a focus on recruiting veterans is a complementary effort to other DOD-wide recruitment strategies?

Mr. CISNEROS and Mr. CONSTABLE. The Services continue to explore a number of different approaches to help improve recruiting outcomes. Veterans have always been a big component in our recruiting efforts. Veterans can share their personal experiences and help tell the positive message that many of today's youth are missing. Reengaging with veterans with the intent of having them return to the force is also an ongoing effort. Each Service has a "Prior Service" program where they seek out former military members with the skills and in the grades needed to help fill and shape the force. I do think that including veterans in our recruiting efforts is a force multiplier and is complementary to our ongoing recruiting efforts.

Mr. PARKER. A focus on recruiting Veterans (as well as Active to Reserve) is not only a complementary strategy for overall recruitment, but a cost-effective endeavor that allows us to place trained and experienced Sailors and Marines to fulfill our mission requirements. Veteran recruits are already trained in their occupation and may also bring beneficial civilian skill sets, such as those in the Marine Innovation Units you mention.

The Navy and Marine Corps both provide opportunities for Veterans to continue serving. Within the Marine Corps, the primary method of recruiting Veterans back into the Marine Corps is through the Marine Corps Recruiting Commands' (MCRC) Prior Service Recruiting (PSR) force. PSR has recruited and processed Veterans into Marine Forces Reserve for over three decades, and into Marine Innovation Units since its creation. In 2022, Navy Recruiting Command (NRC) established the dedicated Navy Recruiting Reserve Command (NRRC) to focus on the Prior Service and Direct Commission Reserve recruiting mission. NRRC's model focuses Reserve recruiters in Reserve markets, working a Reserve-only mission and led by Reserve leaders. In support of this model, NRRC developed a Reserve-centric prior service training and prior service marketing and advertising effort. NRRC is staffed with Officer and Enlisted Canvasser recruiters from a variety of general and specialty rates and designators. Canvasser Recruiters are Reservists on Active Duty recruiting tours for up to 3 years. In essence, NRRC recruiters are Reservists selling Reserve careers. The Prior Service recruiters are strategically placed in densely populated Veteran markets in each State and territory. Navy Recruiting is attacking ways to expand the prior service reach across the Active Duty market to ensure separating individuals have the information they need to consider extending service by way of the Navy Reserve. NRRC currently attends all Transition Assistance Programs (TAP) in the local areas and they have designated benefits advisors that partner with Active Duty Command Career Counselors to educate separating Sailors on Navy Reserve benefits.

Mr. WAGNER. Yes, DAF values the skills and experience our veterans bring, specifically to the Reserves, and we have focused efforts underway designed to leverage this talent. The DAF's 'Go Blue—Stay Blue' campaign is a whole-of-service approach to recruiting and retaining America's best for service, includes attracting veterans for service in the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve. We employ print and digital assets in our on-base and near-base advertising campaigns as well as paid search, digital, social, and other opportunities to specifically target and reach the prior-service/veteran audience across the globe. One of our most recent programs, the Reserve Hypersonics Team "Bullpen," is developing a structure to focus Reserve talent on Service priorities. We also offer affiliation incentives and bonuses to attract fully qualified members into the Air Force Reserve. We hope the increased options to put veterans' unique skills and strengths to work across the DAF, incentives for experience, and our marketing efforts will inspire and increase veteran recruitment.

#### SERVICEMEMBER MENTAL HEALTH IN ALASKA

79. Senator SULLIVAN. Mr. Cisneros, Dr. Schaefer, in May 2022, the Army surged 40 counselors and chaplains to Alaska to address a horrifying increase in suicides in 2021. The Army also setup other initiatives aimed at preventing suicide including mandatory annual counseling sessions for soldiers, a program to connect soldiers' families with Army leaders, and an option for soldiers to choose to serve in Alaska. Congress, specifically the Armed Services Committee, included numerous provisions in the Fiscal Year 2023 NDAA specifically geared to addressing concerns that Alaska-based servicemembers, spouses, and mental health providers brought to my attention during listening sessions I conducted in 2022, including one free trip home during a tour of duty in Alaska and special pay for servicemembers regularly operating outdoors in Arctic conditions. What is your assessment of the Army's response?

Mr. CISNEROS. The Army's responses in Alaska are based upon holistic assessments of the behavioral and social health of the units, as well as an examination of the impacts of the military community and geographic location. I also support the Army's implementation of initiatives based upon these assessments, and I am confident they will continue to identify areas of concern and response.

The Department employs a public health approach to address the complex interdependencies involved in suicide prevention. We work with the Services, including the Army, to support a culture of wellness. We will also continue to join with organizations, both internal and external to DOD, to explore public health approaches that address risk and protective factors, to ensure comprehensive resources are available and accessible to our military community, and to effectively communicate that life is worth living.

Dr. SCHAEFER. Prevention of harmful behaviors, especially suicide, is a priority for the Army. We implemented Mission 100, which dictated that every single Soldier received wellness counseling from a counselor, chaplain, or behavioral health specialist. Many Soldiers were referred from the counseling sessions to other helping agencies for assistance with problems with finance, marriage counseling, and other

problems that were creating stress in their lives. In addition, we focused on other parts of Soldiers' well-being such as providing additional hardship pay and invested in quality of life such as by building a new physical fitness center, community activity center, and child development center.

While we've done well in supporting the Soldiers, Army Civilians and Family members in Alaska, we do believe that more needs to be done to address suicide in the USARAK AOR and across the Army.

80. Senator SULLIVAN. Mr. Cisneros, Dr. Schaefer, do you need any additional authorities to incentivize civilian mental health providers to go to Alaska, like moving stipends or retention bonuses?

Mr. CISNEROS. No, no additional authorities are needed at this time.

Assistant Secretary SCHAEFER. The Army would benefit from approval to exceed the Title 5 U.S.C. 5754 maximum 25 percent limitation placed on recruitment, relocation, and retention incentives for Behavioral Health occupations in Alaska. Having the flexibility to offer higher incentives will improve Army's ability to recruit and retain highly qualified behavioral health providers.

Additionally, while we have the ability to offer paid Permanent Change of Station (PCS) costs to attract civilian employees to Alaska, these employees are subject to the initial payment of taxes for these benefits and entitlements. DOD has the authority to reimburse these costs, but the initial financial liability still falls on the individual.

Employees who have accepted a PCS have experienced initial tax costs in the thousands of dollars, which can be burdensome and dissuade current employees from remaining in the position and future candidates from applying for these vacancies. We would benefit from exempting behavioral health civilian employees from paying taxes associated with PCS benefits and entitlements altogether instead of relying on a reimbursement structure, similar to their military counterparts.

#### MENTAL HEALTH AND ACCESSIONS

81. Senator SULLIVAN. Mr. Cisneros, Dr. Martinez-Lopez, my understanding of the DOD policy for mental health in the accessions process is that Basic accession standards for all military service are defined in the Department of Defense Instruction 6130.03, Volume 1, Medical Standards for Military Service, Appointment, Enlistment, or Induction (see attachment)—any applicant who has received treatment for depression within the last 36 months (at the time of enlistment) is initially disqualified and will require a waiver from the Service Medical Waiver Review Authority. While the disqualification is based on treatment within the previous 36 months and duration of treatment longer than 12 months, the waiver threshold is based on confirming the diagnosis and demonstrated level of pathology within the medical record. Is this understanding correct?

Mr. CISNEROS and Mr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. An individual identified as having a mental health condition is considered for a medical waiver from the waiver authorities with sufficient mitigating circumstances and provided medical documentation on a case-by-case basis. A case-by-case review includes information such as current or past diagnosis, severity of condition, temporality of symptoms, need for ongoing treatment, likelihood of recurrence, and presence of comorbidities or concurrent behaviors (e.g., non-suicidal self-harm, suicidality).

Applicants for military accessions are medically evaluated and deemed qualified or disqualified for service based on medical standards outlined in DOD Instruction (DoDI) 6130.03 Volume 1 (v1), "Medical Standards for Military Service: Appointment, Enlistment, or Induction." Mental health standards are detailed in DODI 6130.03v1, Section 6.28, "Learning, Psychiatric, and Behavioral Disorders" of the policy.

Depressive disorder is disqualifying if: (1) Outpatient care including counseling was required for longer than 12 cumulative months; (2) Symptoms or treatment occurred within the previous 36 months; (3) The applicant required any inpatient treatment in a hospital or residential facility; (4) There has been any recurrence; or (5) Any suicidality (in accordance with DODI 6130.03 V1, Paragraph 6.28.m.).

Applicants who do not meet the physical and medical standards as described in DODI 6130.03v1 can be considered for a medical waiver from the Service waiver authorities, based on additional supporting medical documentation and/or specialty consultation. Service Medical Waiver Review Authorities make waiver determinations on a case-by-case basis to determine suitability for service, emphasizing safety, functionality, assignability, and deployability.

82. Senator SULLIVAN. Mr. Cisneros, Dr. Martinez-Lopez, Mr. Parker, Ms. Schafer, and Mr. Wagner, the chart below is from the DOD, depicting waivers requested and granted during the fiscal year 2016 to 2020 period. Can you provide updated information on mental health waivers requested and granted, by service, through fiscal year 2022?

	Army	Navy	Air Force	Marine Corps
Disqualified from serving due to failure to meet the standards outlined in DOD Instruction 6130.03, Volume 1 (includes any reason; i.e. vision, hearing, ortho, etc., to include learning, psychiatric, and behavioral disorders) .....	89,483	35,738	35,082	31,961
Disqualified from serving specifically due to failure to meet the Learning, Psychiatric, and Behavioral Disorder standards outlined in DOD Instruction 6130.03, Volume 1 .....	13,484	6,013	5,975	6,334
Applied for and were granted a mental/behavioral health waiver .....	2,034	1,706	1,915	2,448
Applied for but were denied a mental/behavioral health waiver .....	2,476	1,719	1,426	1,023

Mr. CISNEROS and Dr. MARTINEZ-LOPEZ. Each Service is responsible, through their Service Medical Waiver Review Authority (SMWRA), for granting medical waivers. The Department ensures that applicants meet accession medical standards in order to enlist in the United States Military. An individual identified as having a mental health condition is considered for a medical waiver from the waiver authorities with sufficient mitigating circumstances and provided medical documentation on a case-by-case basis. A case-by-case review includes information such as current or past diagnosis, severity of condition, temporality of symptoms, need for ongoing treatment, likelihood of recurrence, and presence of comorbidities or concurrent behaviors (e.g., non-suicidal self-harm, suicidality). OSD defers to the Services to provide their waiver numbers. Services provide their waiver data to AMSARA, which publishes the information in an annual report.

Mr. PARKER. The data you provided through fiscal year 2020 is the most recent available based on publication of the *2022 Annual Report on Medical Disqualifications, Medical Waivers, Accessions and Outcomes among fiscal years 2016 2020 Military Applicants* by the Accessions Medical Standards Analysis and Research Activity

I defer to Dr. Martinez-Lopez and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs on the availability of more recent data from that office.

Assistant Secretary SCHAEFER. In Army, each medical waiver submitted for a Behavioral Health diagnosis undergoes a very rigorous process to ensure an applicant's record is provided a holistic review. In fiscal year 2021 & fiscal year 2022 the Army granted 582 Behavioral Health waivers of 662 requested.

Mr. WAGNER. DAF Data for fiscal year 2021 and fiscal year 2022 MEPS accessions:

1. Disqualified for any medical reason—14,322
2. No response. We do not have access to MEPS data for individuals who were disqualified for specific medical conditions. (DAF only has diagnostic breakdowns by medical condition when the individual applies for a waiver.)
3. Applied for and were granted a Mental Health waiver—1,967
4. Applied for and were NOT granted a Mental Health waiver—1,802

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TED BUDD

DOD POLICIES TO PERMIT TAXPAYER FUNDING FOR AND AUTHORIZATION TO TRAVEL TO ACQUIRE ABORTIONS

83. Senator BUDD. Secretary Cisneros, please provide the Committee with the previously requested information on how many women or military families have refused to be stationed in Germany, South Korea, or any other country because of those nations' laws.

Mr. CISNEROS. Unfortunately, rationale of declination of a duty assignment is not information collected at either the OSD or Service level. The information requested also cannot be retroactively obtained.

84. Senator BUDD. Secretary Cisneros, does the Department have any data on women being deterred from joining the military for fear of being stationed at an installation or base in a State or Nation that has restrictive abortion laws?

Mr. CISNEROS. No. The Department does not have any data on women being deterred from joining the military for fear of being stationed at an installation or base in a State or nation that has restrictive abortion laws. However, in servicemember engagements, the Department heard from Service men and women from all grades, ranks, and components. They repeatedly stated that access to reproductive health care was a concern. While many acknowledged that access to reproductive health care was a concern prior to the Dobbs decision, the Supreme Court ruling highlighted this making it a forefront issue for our men and women serving in uniform.

85. Senator BUDD. Secretary Cisneros, if the Department has data on women being deterred from joining the military for fear of being stationed at an installation or base in a State or nation that has restrictive abortion laws military, please provide that data to the Committee, as previously requested.

Mr. CISNEROS. The Department does not have any data on women being deterred from joining the military for fear of being stationed at an installation or base in a State or nation that has restrictive abortion laws.

86. Senator BUDD. Secretary Cisneros, as previously requested, please inform the Committee of what actions, if any, the Department would take against a commander that refused to approve leave or travel to facilitate the abortion of an unborn child in keeping with their sincerely held religious beliefs.

Mr. CISNEROS. While leaders are expected to display objectivity, compassion, and discretion when addressing all health care matters, should they be uncomfortable approving requests for non-covered reproductive health care, they may discuss with their chain of command whether they can refer such requests to a higher echelon of command for approval.

