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SENATE ARMED SERVICES
COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL
OF THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMS, POLICIES,
INITIATIVES AND
BUDGET ALLOCATIONS

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Chairman Nelson, Senator Graham and distinguished members of the committee, it is my distinct honor to appear before you and I welcome the opportunity to testify today on Navy family readiness programs and initiatives. I thank you for your leadership and attention to this vital issue and for your continued support to our Sailors and families.

I am a clinical psychologist by training and have worked for the past 20 years providing assistance to individuals and families. I have had the privilege of working for Navy Fleet and Family Support Programs since 1997.

Background:

Since 2005, Navy Family Readiness program management, implementation, execution and programming have been aligned within Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC). This alignment has resulted in increased effectiveness, flexibility and responsiveness in program management and service delivery from the headquarters to the installation level and has ensured that program development, and resourcing decisions are not divorced from the practical realities of delivering ground-level support and responding to the challenges faced by Navy families who are coping with increased operational tempo, nontraditional duty assignments and sustained overseas contingency operations.

Within CNIC, Navy Family Readiness programs consist of Navy Fleet and Family Support Programs, Child and Youth Programs and Emergency Preparedness and Community Alliance Programs, the latter of which provides preparedness and coordinated family support during natural or man-made emergencies or noncombatant evacuation and repatriation events. Our preparedness and ability to respond to Navy families during emergencies through our support to Family Assistance Centers and focused assessment and case management has increased significantly since the Gulf Coast Hurricanes in 2005.

Since the establishment of CNIC in the fall of 2003, Navy Family Readiness programs have been afforded the highest visibility, advocacy and priority. In fact, the Navy's commitment to family readiness has resulted in increased capability for both Navy Fleet and Family Support Programs and Child Development and Youth Programs. In practical terms, this has resulted in increased services to family members, increased individual assistance and consultation, more varied educational programs, more proactive outreach, delivery of family support services in locations most conducive to family member engagement and increased child care capacity.

Fleet and Family Support Programs:

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of Navy Family Service Centers (now called Fleet and Family Support Centers). Fleet and Family Support Programs (FFSP) support individual and family readiness and adaptation to life in the Navy and include emergency preparedness and response, crisis intervention and response, personal and family wellness education and counseling, military and personal career development, financial education and counseling, spouse employment, and deployment support for Sailors and their family members. Programs and services are currently delivered from 81 sites worldwide, with 58 of those sites delivering a full portfolio of programs and services.

Navy FFSP is organized into three sub-functional areas: Deployment Readiness, Career Support and Retention, and Crisis Response. Across all three sub-functions, services include information and referral, individual clinical and non-clinical consultation and educational classes and workshops.

Deployment Readiness includes services provided in the areas of deployment support, ombudsmen coordination, relocation assistance, and life skills education. Deployment Readiness has always been and remains the area of highest priority for Navy family support. Deployment

support focuses on practical preparation, emotional aspects of separation, supporting children during deployment, maintaining communication and closeness during deployment, and homecoming and successful reintegration of the Sailor into the family and community. Planned for 2010 is development and delivery of an electronic deployment toolkit/sea bag for school administrators and staff to better equip them in working with children of deployed Sailors.

As the nature of Navy deployment has changed, so have our deployment support services. We now understand that family deployment preparedness is not a predictable, cyclical process but a daily state to be maintained. For example, Fleet and Family Support Centers now provide outreach calls, assessment and recurring support to families of Sailors on Individual Augmentee (IA) and Global War on Terror Support Assignments (GSA) serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and other locations in support of Overseas Contingency Operations. Efforts to better reach remotely located families impacted by these nontraditional duty assignments have included use of information technology to provide virtual family discussion groups and workshops, publication of a monthly electronic newsletter and of Family, Sailor and Command IA Handbooks.

Command Ombudsmen are trained volunteers who serve as a vital two-way communication link between command leadership and family members. Ombudsmen provide personalized support and guidance to families in adapting to the challenges of a mobile military lifestyle and extended operations necessary to meet the Navy's maritime strategy. There are currently over 2,200 registered Navy Family Ombudsmen. Fleet and Family Support Centers provide training, consultation, coordination and support to Ombudsmen.

Navy Fleet and Family Support Centers also support the development and sustainment of Family Readiness Groups (FRGs). These groups enhance preparedness by providing an informal

and less structured opportunity for family members to meet on a regular basis for camaraderie, companionship and support. They plan family activities during deployments, mentor new family members and assist families in times of crisis.

Career Support and Retention includes services provided in the areas of Personal Financial Management, Transition Assistance, and Family Employment Readiness.

Managing money in today's economy can be challenging. The Navy's Personal Financial Management (PFM) program provides a collaborative and comprehensive approach to education and counseling that emphasizes a proactive, career lifecycle approach to behavior modification. Services include individualized assistance that fosters financial responsibility and accountability with primary emphasis on financial independence, sound money management, debt avoidance, and long-term financial stability. Personal financial fitness services are delivered by a network of Accredited Financial Counselors and educators at the Fleet and Family Support Centers, and Command Financial Specialists, with collaboration from partner organizations. Increased partnerships between Fleet and Family Support Centers and Child Development and Youth Programs at the installation level have increased youth education regarding financial fitness. The Navy PFM program was recognized as a Financial Education Program of the Year by the Association of Financial Counseling, Planning, and Education (AFCPE) in 2006, and received recognition as an Exemplary Employer Initiative by the Personal Finance Employee Education Foundation in 2008. More than 9,996 family members received financial education services during 2008, which represented a 100% increase over 2007.

Leaving the Navy is not just a matter of changing jobs; it's a total lifestyle change. Civilian life and the military life can seem like two different worlds, especially if a Sailor's entire working career has been in the Navy. Fleet and Family Support Centers host the U.S.

Department of Labor sponsored Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Employment Workshop. Sailors who are planning to leave the Navy or retire are encouraged to take advantage of all the services offered through the Centers at no cost. Similar services in the private sector would cost hundreds of dollars. TAP employment workshops are designed to provide Sailors with the basic knowledge and skills necessary to plan and execute a successful job search. Department of Labor instructors conduct the three-day TAP workshops, focusing on subjects such as skills identification, post-military goals and ambitions, conducting job searches, writing a resume, preparing for an interview and dressing for success in a new career. The core TAP curriculum also includes presentations by the Department of Veterans Affairs on VA benefits and information on disability transition assistance.

Local FFSP professionals provide additional employment assistance and resources. These services often include individual counseling; job fairs, search libraries and access to employment listings; automated tools and personal assistance for preparing resumes, cover letters and federal job applications; and guidance in preparing for interviews.

The Navy recognizes that moving every few years creates career challenges for military spouses. The Family Employment Readiness Program addresses those challenges in workshops and through individualized assistance. We provide assistance with self-directed job search through an employment resource center, information and referral services, career development and coaching, staff assisted job search, and much more. Workshops and seminars are routinely provided and create a framework for further educational exploration in areas such as: Resume Writing, Effective Job Search Strategies, Interviewing Techniques, Federal Employment Opportunities, Entrepreneur Business Opportunities, Personal Skills Assessment, and Financing Career Change. During 2008, nearly 2,900 Navy spouses were awarded scholarships at six Navy

pilot locations through joint DoD/DoL Career Advancement Account (CAA) partnerships. The CAA program has now been expanded world-wide. Our staff conducted over 3,000 employer education events to market military spouses as solutions to hiring needs. Notably, 49% of our Navy Child and Youth Programs professional workforce are military spouses, which affords them mobile career opportunities. More than 2,490 spouses voluntarily reported securing employment as a result of program efforts.

Crisis Response includes programs and services provided in the areas of clinical counseling, family violence prevention, case management and victim advocacy, new parent support and sexual assault prevention and response.

From the beginning, Fleet and Family Support Centers have offered clinical counseling services, which is unique to the Department of the Navy. Clinical counseling is provided by independently licensed mental health professionals, some of whom have additional training and experience providing counseling services to children. Counseling services are brief and solution-focused in response to commonly occurring life experiences such as marital discord, parent-child conflict, or occupational/school issues. The intent of these services is early identification and prevention of more significant conditions or problems, thereby promoting improved quality of life and increased resilience in individuals and families.

Navy Fleet and Family Support Centers are also actively engaged in support of Navy Operational Stress Control (OSC) initiatives. OSC is a line owned and led program supported by Navy Medicine. The goal of OSC is to promote psychological health, reduce stigma associated with seeking psychological services and improve overall resilience in our Sailors and their families. OSC provides practical decision-making tools for Sailors, leaders and families so they can identify stress responses and mitigate problems before they become disruptive. In

collaboration with the Navy line and medicine, we have launched a family awareness effort by incorporating OSC concepts into existing family support programs and services whenever possible. We are also working with Chaplains delivering OSC briefs to Sailors awaiting IA/GSA deployments and are participating in the development of formal OSC curriculum to be delivered at key nodes of training throughout the Sailor's career.

FFSP facilitates Navy suicide prevention initiatives by coordinating with Chaplains to provide annual suicide prevention training to Sailors and by providing suicide awareness and prevention programs to families and communities. When someone seeking counseling at the Fleet and Family Support Center is assessed to be clinically depressed or suicidal, they are referred to the local Medical Treatment Facility (MTF) or to community mental health providers through TRICARE.

The Family Advocacy Program (FAP) provides safety assessment and planning, clinical assessment, case management, victim advocacy, and intervention to military families referred for alleged child abuse/neglect or domestic abuse. The primary goals of FAP are prevention, victim safety and support, rehabilitative intervention, offender accountability and provision of a consistent and appropriate response to allegations of family maltreatment. The location of Family Advocacy Program prevention and intervention services within Navy Fleet and Family Support Centers is unique to the Department of the Navy and provides an effective continuum of care whereby common stresses associated with family violence risk can be identified and addressed in a more holistic, less stigmatizing manner. Maintaining abuse-free and adaptive family relationships is critical to Navy mission readiness, maintenance of good order and discipline, and quality of service for our Sailors and their families.

The New Parent Support Home Visitation Program provides voluntary home visitation services for over-burdened expectant and new parents. Home visiting services are available for new parents of children age zero to three. Single parents and parents with a deployed member are automatically screened as eligible for home visitation. The New Parent Support Program has a demonstrated, positive impact in the prevention of child maltreatment. New Parent Support personnel also coordinate closely with Navy medicine in delivery of special primary prevention initiatives such as reducing infant deaths from shaking and unsafe sleeping practices.

Navy Fleet and Family Support Programs work in collaboration with the Navy Safe Harbor Program to support family members of the wounded, ill, and injured. We provide information, resources and referral, relocation assistance, financial counseling, clinical counseling, and transition assistance.

We work closely with the Navy Reserve Forces Family Support Coordinator and the five regional Family Support Administrators. Together we facilitate the connection of reserve families to each other, to supportive military and community resources, and we improve community awareness of military families' experiences and needs. The primary focus of our efforts supports families living apart from military installations. The Family Support Administrators liaison with their assigned Navy Operational Support Center (NOSC) staffs to ensure families are supported by Navy and other services' family support programs, including the Joint Family Support Assistance Programs (JFSAP).

Child Development and Youth Programs:

The Child Development and Youth Programs help families balance the competing demands of mission readiness and family responsibilities. The Navy provides high quality child care, youth development, and school transition services for 120,780 children from four weeks to

18 years of age. We currently operate 128 Child Development Centers, 3,000 Child Development Homes, 86 School-Age Care programs, and 103 Youth Centers. Our programs continue to be ranked amongst the highest in the nation for quality and oversight.

The Department of Defense goal is to achieve child care capacity for 80% of potential need which is sufficient capacity to place children from waiting lists within three months after care is requested. Our current capacity meets 72% of the potential need with a six month placement time, except in fleet concentration areas where placement time can be longer.

The availability of child care remains a top issue among our single parents and dual-career families. To attain the DoD goal, the Navy's expansion plan is adding approximately 7,000 new child care spaces. This expansion includes construction of 26 new child development centers (including facilities open 24/7), the conversion of existing pre-school age spaces into infant spaces to meet the greatest demand, commercial contracts in communities throughout the United States, and expanding military certified home care. Combined, these initiatives will reduce the waiting time for child care to three months or less Navy-wide with first priority given to single parents.

Several of these expansion projects have utilized the temporary National Defense Authorization Act authority that increased the Department's minor construction threshold authority for child development centers.

Our continuing expansion initiatives are not only meeting the needs of our families living on or near our installations but also those living and working throughout the United States, including Reserve members. Our contract programs "Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood" and "Mission Youth Outreach" provide subsidized child and youth services from

commercial programs that meet community quality standards. We continue to work with communities, assisting them with raising the quality of their standards.

Another area of expansion is our new contract program that provides subsidized, quality respite care to our families with severe special needs. This new program certifies qualified community and military providers to care for children that are not easily accommodated within existing programs.

Support to our children with deployed members continues and includes our new “Give Parents a Break” program and the use of Child and Youth Behavior Consultants imbedded in our programs. These consultants provide a resource to observe and train our professionals on interventions to assist children and their families having challenges during deployments.

We have also launched a new Navy-wide School Liaison Officer program which is designed to assist Navy families and local school districts with the dependent education issues arising from frequent moves and deployments.

Summary and Conclusion:

Increasing our response capability to reach geographically dispersed family members of our active and reserve components remain at the forefront of our efforts. We will continue our efforts, within our budgetary constraints, to provide resources and services to IA/GSA families, families of wounded, ill or injured, and our ombudsmen network that supports them. We will continue to explore creative solutions to overcome impediments to full utilization of technology solutions that equip us to maintain unfettered communications with families. Our primary focus remains on delivering the best services at the right time and in the right place.

As we continue to address the needs of Sailors and their families, our guiding principles continue to:

- Target our resources to the most critical requirements, focusing on our fleet and family readiness, resilience, and quality of life;
- Aggressively identify opportunities to eliminate redundancies, under-utilized services, and outdated standards of practice;
- Ensure consistent quality of service and performance standards across all of our installations; and
- Refine, strengthen, align, and integrate our family support planning capabilities and processes to ensure optimized results.