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UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

**STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL
OF THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
QUALITY OF LIFE PANEL
FEBRUARY 11, 2026**

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, and distinguished Members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to provide my perspective on the quality of life of our Sailors and their families. I am humbled to represent the men and women of the United States Navy whose daily service underwrites our nation's security and prosperity. As the senior enlisted advisor to the Chief of Naval Operations it is my duty to provide perspective on what Sailors need to remain ready and resilient. Your sustained oversight of military quality of life is an investment in readiness because the lived experience of Sailors and families directly affects performance, retention, and our ability to prevail in conflict.

Since assuming the role of Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, my focus has been rooted in a simple principle: build competent, confident Sailors who embody the warfighting character and fighting spirit that our nation can depend on. Every Sailor owns readiness. Every leader develops people. And every command speaks truthfully about performance and acts decisively to improve it. Quality of life is the human foundation of that vision, especially for a forward-deployed Navy that spends significant time at sea and away from home.

My priorities are consequential to readiness and reinforce our warfighting ethos: (1) Sailors and Families First, (2) Technical Mastery at Every Level, and (3) Continuous Development and Talent Management. These priorities reinforce one another. When we remove preventable stressors, we improve the holistic strength of our Sailors and their families. When we build mastery, we increase lethality and safety. When we develop and retain confident, competent Sailors of character, they form the foundation that sustains readiness.

PRIORITY 1: SAILORS AND FAMILIES FIRST

Sailors are America's asymmetric advantage and the lethality behind our weapons systems. They deserve housing and childcare that meet modern industry standards, timely access to healthcare, and facilities and services that reflect the demands of Navy life. When those basics are unstable, Sailors lose time and trust navigating problems that should never reach the deck plates. That lost time is time not spent training, maintaining equipment, or standing watch. When those basics are strong, Sailors can concentrate on warfighting proficiency, leaders can focus on developing teams, and families can sustain the operational tempo our national defense requires.

When I travel around the fleet, access to medical care is one of the most consequential issues Sailors and families raise. For a young family, the difference between a timely appointment and weeks of uncertainty can determine whether a Sailor stays focused on the mission or spends days navigating referrals and network availability. Readiness depends on healthy people, and family stability depends on dependable care.

I support continued efforts to improve appointment availability and reduce friction when beneficiaries seek care, strengthening appointment systems and call centers, expanding telehealth where appropriate, improving network adequacy for families, and increasing the availability of credentialed providers in high-demand specialties. These efforts directly reduce lost duty time and improve unit focus. I also encourage the Committee to consider policies that reflect the realities of today's families, including the potential benefit of aligning dependent coverage age limits with common civilian practice so families are not forced into abrupt transitions during critical years of education and early employment.

Mental health care is a readiness issue and a moral obligation. Improving access requires capacity: credentialed providers, a mix of in-person and virtual options, embedded support in operational units where appropriate, and clear pathways for referral that preserve dignity and

privacy. Leader education to recognize early indicators of distress is equally important. In parallel, we must continue to advance Total Sailor Fitness, integrating physical readiness, mental health, spiritual resilience, and social connection so leaders can intervene early and strengthen protective factors before a crisis occurs. We must ensure that each of our installations is equipped with the right mix of mental health specialists, chaplains, and accessible exercise and dining facilities in order for our Sailors to maintain strong mental health.

Housing is often the most visible measure of whether an institution values its people. When housing standards are not met, timely corrective action and clear accountability must follow. Unaccompanied Housing and privatized housing must be safe, well-maintained, and worthy of service. Focused Navy efforts to identify high-risk facilities, accelerate repairs, strengthen inspections, and enforce accountability are essential and they support another objective: moving Sailors off ships and into appropriate housing, improving sleep, safety, morale, and retention while protecting maintenance and readiness.

Childcare is a readiness and retention issue. Expanded Child Development Center capacity, workforce stability for childcare providers, and flexible care options reduce waitlists and enable operational availability, especially for dual-military families and single parents. I appreciate investments that expand capacity, and I encourage continued attention to the hiring and retention of the childcare workforce, so new facilities translate into dependable access.

Frequent moves and the administrative burden that accompanies them remain significant stressors for Navy families. Delays in household goods, gaps in lodging availability, and inconsistent local processes can create financial strain and uncertainty at exactly the moment a Sailor is expected to report ready to perform. Policies and resources that improve the predictability of permanent change of station moves, especially during peak seasons, and

strengthen spouse employment support help keep families resilient and reduce avoidable attrition.

Finally, quality of life initiatives must be measured and enforced with the same discipline we apply to operational readiness. Sailors should not have to rely on ad hoc solutions to solve problems that have clear owners. I support efforts that increase transparency in facility conditions and service performance, strengthen inspection and reporting, and ensure leaders at every level take timely action when standards are not met.

Quality of life also includes the moral and physical safety of our people. The Navy must continue to maintain an uncompromising stance against sexual assault and harassment and family violence, while improving the protective factors to stem the tide of suicides. LET ME BE CLEAR, these destructive behaviors have NO place in our Navy, and we MUST maintain a bias towards action in mitigating factors which impede operations and impact Sailor and family readiness. Continued advocacy for our prevention and response programs is instrumental to mitigating destructive behaviors, promoting recovery, and advancing our Total Sailor Fitness initiatives. Our approach must be clear: prevention where possible, swift, appropriate accountability when wrongdoing occurs, and reliable care and support for victims and those at risk.

PRIORITY 2: TECHNICAL MASTERY AT EVERY LEVEL

Our Navy exists to fight and win at sea. Achieving that mission in a contested environment demands technical mastery across the deck plates, in maintenance, in cyber and information warfare specialties, and in every rating that keeps ships, submarines, aircraft, and networks ready. Mastery is built through deliberate training pipelines, meaningful qualification, and leaders who enforce a bias towards action and standards while investing in people.

Our strength cannot be outsourced. Where feasible, we should expand the Navy's ability to maintain and repair equipment organically by ensuring Sailors have the tools, documentation, and access needed to do the work. When critical knowledge is locked behind contractor-only access, repairs slow, costs rise, and Sailors lose opportunities to learn and own their platforms. Strengthening organic capability preserves institutional knowledge, improves long-term readiness, and ensures we remain the most dominant Naval power in the world.

Damage control is another area where mastery saves lives. The sea is unforgiving, and every Sailor must be ready to respond to fire, flooding, and battle damage. I support continued investment in modern training; live where appropriate and high-fidelity simulation where necessary, as well as efforts to ensure Sailors graduate from initial training with a strong baseline in firefighting and basic damage control competence.

Mastery is also tied to manning and retention. A properly manned unit trains better, maintains equipment correctly, and avoids burnout that drives talented Sailors to separate. Recruiting and retention are therefore inseparable from quality of life. We must attract new talent and keep experienced Sailors by providing predictable career paths, fair and transparent assignment processes, meaningful professional growth, and confidence that the Navy will take care of their families.

With the Committee's partnership, we can adapt to labor-market trends, expand pathways into critical specialties, and improve retention by ensuring Sailors feel valued, developed, and part of a team that wins. Meeting accession goals matters, but the objective is not simply end strength, the objective is a ready force of competent, confident Sailors who can fight tonight.

PRIORITY 3: CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

Every Sailor deserves a defined path of learning, growth, and advancement, so each can rise to their full potential. Continuous development is how we build leaders who can operate with initiative, integrate across communities, and make sound decisions under pressure. This development creates decision advantage in complex operational environments for our commanders. It is also how we improve retention: people stay when they can see a future and when leaders invest in them.

I support expanding senior enlisted education that develops strategic thinking and broadens perspective, strengthening the enlisted corps' ability to advise commanders and lead complex organizations. Additionally, the Navy must continue to mature enlisted leader development into a coherent, career-long continuum supported by a single, accessible source of expectations aligned across accession training, technical schools, command programs, and senior enlisted education.

Education benefits such as Tuition Assistance and the United States Naval Community College strengthen readiness and retention by building skills the Navy needs, while reinforcing our message that we invest in our people. Continued funding and policy support for these programs helps Sailors progress professionally while serving and helps the Navy compete for talent in technical and high-demand fields.

In closing, I remain committed to working with this Committee, Congress, and Navy leadership to improve the quality of service of our Sailors and their families. I will continue to speak candidly with this Committee about where we are succeeding and where we must improve. I will relentlessly pursue readiness, enforce standards and our core values, and speak plainly about what Sailors need to fight and win. Quality of life improvements are operational enablers.

When we remove preventable stressors, we increase readiness, strengthen families, and retain the talent the Navy and the nation require.