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UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

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Introduction

Chair Hirono, Ranking Member Sullivan, and distinguished members of the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the state of Navy readiness. On behalf of the Secretary of the Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations, and our Sailors, civilians, and families deployed and stationed around the world, we appreciate your continued support and partnership in assuring that our Navy remains ready for prompt and sustained combat, as well as supporting the peacetime promotion of the national security interests and prosperity of the United States.

Navy's Contribution to National Security

The U.S. Navy, the premier maritime force in the world, remains deployed forward, supporting our national interests while being ready to respond in crisis and conflict. The current and future security environment demands ready ships, aircraft, submarines, expeditionary forces, information forces, and special operations forces that are combat-credible. These forces deter our potential adversaries and are prepared to fight and win in any domain.

The Navy delivers significant warfighting advantage to the Joint Force at the front lines of Strategic Competition, through our survivable strategic deterrent and combat-credible forces deployed forward across all domains. Our adversaries seek to challenge this warfighting advantage through military buildup and coercive behavior, undermining the existing international rules-based order. This is the case with America's pacing challenge – the People's Republic of China (PRC) – over the past year. The Navy's consistent presence in the Indo-Pacific, which comprises of 60% of our surface force and 58% of our subsurface force, deters and complicates the PRC's decision-calculus and regional plans while reassuring our Allies and

partners. In 2022, the Navy deployed 95 ships, 28 submarines, and 75 aviation squadrons to the Western Pacific, maintained continuous strategic deterrence patrols by our SSBN fleet, and conducted numerous Freedom of Navigation Operations challenging excessive maritime claims in the South China Sea to uphold the rights, freedom, and lawful uses of the sea recognized in international law. We also conducted regular transits of the Taiwan Strait. In response to Russia's illegal, unprovoked, and irresponsible invasion of Ukraine over the past year, we deployed 27 ships, 14 submarines, and 31 aviation squadrons to the European theater to deter Russia and reassure our NATO Allies and partners that we are committed to their security. When our adversaries act, your Navy is ready, and provides options to our decision-makers.

In 2022, the Navy-Marine Corps team generated combat power with global impact – unmatched by any other naval force – flying nearly 1 million hours, sailing over 22,000 days, and participating in almost 100 exercises. These efforts deter strategic attack, support and assure our Allies, protect freedom of the seas, and project naval power across all domains. The President's Budget request for FY24 (PB-24) reflects the reality that readiness is the key enabler for naval superiority and that ship operations are the Navy's core capability and the foundation of maritime dominance. The budget supports a target deployment length of seven months for rotational surface forces as defined in the Optimized Fleet Response Plan, allowing for 58 days underway per quarter while deployed and 24 days underway per quarter while non-deployed to sustain proficiency. It also funds the flying hour program to operate and maintain Navy aircraft and train the pilots needed to enable carrier strike group power projection. The Navy's active and reserve FY24 flying hour program budget of \$7.4 billion for the Navy provides flying hours for global operations, greater operational availability, and recovery of strike fighter pilot production.

Along with sustained funding for ship and air depot maintenance, these core readiness investments ensure Sailors are trained, and ships, submarines, and aircraft are maintained.

The Navy's Navigation Plan highlights the importance of generating effects that strengthen our Nation's deterrence, campaign through forward presence, and build enduring warfighting advantages. Generating these effects is not just about flying hours and steaming days, but also ensuring our ships and aircraft are capable of sustained operations. The Navy recognizes the importance and impact of maritime, aviation, and weapon spares on readiness and has made funding for spares a top priority in this budget. Consistent and executable spares funding is required to maintain adequate levels of aviation, shipboard, and weapons spare parts to support Fleet training and deployed operations. With the help of Congress, we are systematically recovering from years of underfunding these critical accounts and increasing spares funding, ensuring it is executable based on what the industrial base can produce. We are working closely with our critical supply and industry partners to optimize the flow of spares and repair parts. Relative to last year's budget request, this year's request for aviation and maritime spares has increased by \$330M, totaling \$2.3B in 2024. This is a clear indication of the importance the Navy places on spares and will ensure our Fleet is self-sufficient and ready for sustained operations.

A safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent undergirds and is foundational to every priority in the National Defense Strategy and is central to integrated deterrence. Our Navy operates and maintains the most survivable leg of the Nation's nuclear triad, representing approximately 70% of America's treaty-accountable, nuclear arsenal. Navy's FY24 budget requests the resources to replace the 14 Ohio-class submarines with the more capable Columbia-class and continue development of the second life extension of the TRIDENT II D5 missile, as

well as refresh supporting infrastructure and modernize our nuclear command, control, and communications systems. Our Ohio-class submarines have been patrolling the oceans on deterrent missions for 42 years. This once-in-a-generation overhaul of our ballistic missile submarine force comes with a massive price tag, but it is a must-pay bill for the Nation so that we maintain America's assured second-strike capability.

The budget request reflects CNO's priorities of *Columbia*, Readiness, Capabilities, and Capacity, all underpinned by our great Sailors.

State of Readiness

One of the keys to generating available forces is to ensure our ships and aircraft get in and out of maintenance on time, and on budget. We are pursuing a data-driven approach to improve the effectiveness of surface ship and submarine maintenance. In both the private and the public shipyards, we are seeing trends in a positive direction, because data and advanced analytics now inform the plan for each maintenance period and yield improved processes for better-scoped work. Since FY19, days of maintenance delay on major CNO surface ship availabilities in private shipyards have been reduced by 39 percent, and on-time completion steadily increased from 34 percent in FY19 to 41 percent in FY22 for all availabilities, despite the additional impacts associated with the COVID pandemic. Public shipyards also have seen improvements over the last several years, with maintenance delays on submarine and aircraft carrier availabilities reduced by 40 percent since FY19, and on-time completion steadily increasing from 29 percent in FY19 to 33 percent in FY22 for all availabilities.

Throughout this effort, our focal point is to ensure ships and aircraft are ready to support the training and certification of our crews for their deployments and operations. We remain

committed to only deploying fully trained and certified crews. Our commitment is reflected in our policy to stringently review and control unit certifications at the 4-star fleet commander level prior to employment of our forces. We also are reviewing organizational changes to make us more effective in the generation of ready ships. In December 2021, the Navy reconstituted a submarine squadron to oversee submarines while they were being repaired and overhauled at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. Submarine Squadron 2 provides administrative, manning, logistical, operational planning, and readiness support for attack submarines and crews during their time in Portsmouth. The Navy also is re-establishing surface ship readiness squadrons that are focused on providing oversight and expertise for ships in the maintenance phase and the basic level training phase. Surface ship readiness squadrons provide a dedicated command, directly aligned to the type commander and systems commander, to manage, execute, and support ships in complex maintenance periods. This initiative provides focused oversight during this critical period, and allows our operational commanders to concentrate on warfighting. We anticipate the first pilot of the surface ship readiness squadron will stand up this year, with fleet-wide introduction completed within the next three years.

Surface Ship Maintenance

The Navy is committed to working closely with private shipyard partners to improve maintenance and modernization outcomes. In particular, Performance to Plan (P2P)-driven improvements—such as the goal of awarding contracts 120 days before the start of a maintenance availability (A-120), level loading ports through better prediction of workload, better availability planning, and improved long-lead-time material acquisition—have provided effective solutions for readiness and reduced maintenance delays. A-120 has allowed the Navy to

have long lead time material on time, develop integrated production schedules, and contract for services that improve on-time completion of ship availabilities. Additionally, the Navy continues to see positive performance improvements from the Other Procurement, Navy (OPN) pilot across both Fleets for private-sector maintenance. The OPN pilot has helped significantly in this area, providing the Navy cross-fiscal year flexibility for contract awards and material procurements, enabling the Navy to maintain positive momentum and ensure ships deliver back to the Fleet on time, with work completed in full, and without the need for additional funding in successive fiscal years. PB-24 includes the Navy's request to continue to utilize the OPN pilot and its authorities to allow continued progress and performance improvements in surface ship availability outcomes. In FY24, 28 of 57 surface ship availabilities are funded in the OPN pilot.

Another way we aim to reduce shipyard delays is to ensure our ships are receiving the required level of maintenance and modernization at regular intervals throughout their lives. As a result of decisions decades ago to keep ships at sea and on mission, our Navy accepted risk in ship maintenance. As these ships come to the end of their service lives, we know that their material condition is poor and have seen direct impacts in their ability to support mission requirements. This small number of ships is also having an outsized impact on the days of maintenance delay. About half of all maintenance delays over the last several years are due to a few ships that recently completed or are currently going through major modernization periods. When these ships were inducted, we discovered 'worse-than-planned' conditions that created a large amount of unplanned new and growth work. These ships are years behind schedule, well over-budget, and without a clear path to completion, and their crews are missing critical at-sea experiences. Continuing to fund costly modernizations for ships with limited remaining service life and low warfighting utility risks pulling resources away from higher priority readiness needs.

In addition, this growth work presents real cost progression and further reduces shipyard capacity that detracts from maintaining more capable ships.

The Navy is committed to conducting a hull-by-hull assessment of each and every ship, regardless of service life, to determine what warfighting value each ship can contribute based on what the National Defense Strategy requires of the Navy. We owe it to our Sailors to ensure their ships are materially ready to support the mission requirements we place upon them. Older ships with poor material condition not only increase risk to mission success, but also may increase risk to the Sailors that serve in them. Thanks to congressional support, we were able to divest some of our older ships that were in poor material condition. One of these ships was the *USS Vella Gulf*. During the ship's planned 7-month deployment with the *Eisenhower* Strike Group in 2021, the ship experienced a material failure of an internal fuel tank that caused a significant fuel leak in the main machinery space. This casualty ultimately reduced the availability of this ship to three of seven months on mission due to emergent repairs. Not only did this failure impact mission readiness, the presence of fuel leaking into a main machinery space also increased the risk to the Sailors on the ship. This recent example is why we ask for your continued support to allow us to remove ships that have an unrealistic and cost-prohibitive path to returning to the level of operational standards that are required for our combat forces.

Although there may be concern with a reduction of available work for the ship repair industrial base if older ships are removed from inventory, the PB-24 budget funds a total of 75 availabilities for conventional and nuclear forces. The Navy is committed to providing a steady and stable demand signal to enable our industrial base partners to secure a workforce and invest and modernize facilities to meet fleet demand. To achieve this, Navy publicly posts workload forecasts for each port quarterly that include three-year workload projections, allowing industry

to understand current and future planned work. We know that there is more than enough work to be done and, with our industry partners, will continue to leverage all of our capacity to ensure ships enter and exit their maintenance periods on time.

Submarine Maintenance

Since assuming the role of VCNO, I have made it one of my top priorities to improve submarine maintenance, with a weather eye on Navy's stated need for up to 66 fast attack submarines. I have personally visited the Navy's public shipyards in Portsmouth, Pearl Harbor, and Bremerton. Improving our public shipyard performance and getting submarines in and out of maintenance on time is critical to this goal. Today, we are projecting about 700 days of maintenance delays in the public yards for both submarines and aircraft carriers, which is an improvement from over 1500 days of delay in 2019. We aim to drive this number down to the only acceptable number--zero. In this effort, we have identified that one of the key drivers of these delays is late or unavailable material. PB-24 includes \$541 million to establish and support a rotatable pool of submarine parts aimed to reduced maintenance delays while waiting for parts refurbishment or overhaul. In addition, PB-24 commits to sustaining a public shipyard workforce of 37,234, a 40-percent increase over the last decade, to develop a strong, sustainable experience base in our tradesmen and shipyard artisans. They are as important in this "decisive decade" as the submarines we are building and maintaining.

Aviation Maintenance

The Navy remains committed to continuing improvements in aviation maintenance. PB-24 increases funding for aviation depot maintenance and increases funding for spare parts. In

FY22, Navy executed 100% of allocated funds, which resulted in zero unfunded backlog of airframes, engines, and modules. The increased funding meets 91% of the requirement and allows for the induction of an additional 200 aircraft. Through our strategy of using data analytics to remove barriers to performance, the Navy continues to track Mission Capable Aircraft Required (MCAR) delta which measures the difference between the respective aircraft MCAR Standard (varies by aircraft) and the actual Mission Capable aircraft available. Currently, the MCAR deltas were all within a range of -8 to +18 aircraft for F/A-18 E/F, F-35C, EA-18G, E-2D, MH-60R/S, P-8A, and MH-53 aircraft.

These analytics inform all Navy investments sparing, improved accountability, and readiness process changes. As a result, we are making good progress on getting airplanes in and out of maintenance on time, ready for the “flight-line.” In addition, we are working with our industrial base partner to improve the performance of our Service Life Extension/Modification (SLM) Program for F/A-18s, which both increases the service life and aircraft capabilities in high-end warfighting. Recently, we stood-up capabilities to conduct this SLM at Fleet Readiness Center Southwest to increase throughput of SLMs. There are currently 136 planned SLM inductions across the FYDP, with a ramp-up to 35 inductions per year by FY28, and a target turnaround time of 12 months. SLM will cost less than one-third the price of new aircraft with comparable capabilities, a cost savings that outweighs the tradeoff in remaining flight hours.

The Naval Aviation Enterprise Future Readiness Team (FRT) continues into its twelfth year. Charged with finding, vetting, and funding innovative maintenance and reliability improvement processes, it continues to increase readiness at reduced cost. In FY22, the FRT tracked 59 initiatives that contributed \$248.4 million in savings.

Safety

The Navy remains committed to preventing future mishaps that result in the loss of ships, submarines, aircraft and the lives of Sailors and Marines. We established Naval Safety Command on February 4, 2022, charged with continuous organizational learning across the enterprise to understand actions and behaviors that directly contribute to mishaps and prevent their future occurrence. The Fleet Safety Management System, which was released in December 2022, aims to increase awareness and refocus the importance of safety protocols used to identify, control, and mitigate risk. The Safety Management System reinforces risk-management, problem-solving, and critical thinking at all levels of the Navy; ensures that accountability for risk is held at the appropriate level; and verifies that assurance and regulatory requirements are met. Naval Safety Command's assessment process will determine whether a command has effectively instilled behaviors of self-awareness, self-assessment, self-correction, and continual learning to enable a defense-in-depth that ensures the command is Safe-to-Operate and Operating Safely through proper risk identification, communication, and accountability at the appropriate level. As part of their efforts, Naval Safety Command's mandate includes unannounced visits to 18 major fleet concentration areas annually to assess risk management behavior and compliance with established policy. The end goal is to ensure unit-level commands have proper risk identification measures, good communication, and appropriate risk accountability at the appropriate level within the chain of command. Between FY22 and FY23, we are on pace to reduce Class A mishaps across the aviation and afloat enterprises.

Learning to Action Board (L2AB)

The Learning to Action Board (L2AB) addresses Navy-wide systemic problems, risk of organizational drift, and failures to learn which have led to catastrophic incidents and negative trends in performance. The primary lines of effort for the L2AB include continued focus on correctional efforts related to the *USS Bonhomme Richard* fire, the Red Hill fuel spill, and a review of the actions taken after the *USS McCain* and *USS Fitzgerald* at-sea collisions in 2017. L2AB efforts have led to the establishment of Naval Safety Command, the re-prioritization of \$260M for fire prevention and response related funding, identification and assignment of 104 action items to improve shore-based fueling operations, and improving Navy Command and Control structure to better align the force and remove unnecessary and previously unidentified risk. Future efforts for L2AB include assessing the investigations into recent suicides, examining fleet infrastructure, and streamlining the Navy's assessment process. These efforts are undertaken with the goal of addressing unmitigated risk, driving accountability, bringing tangible solutions to long-standing deckplate issues, and increasing fleet readiness.

Maintenance Infrastructure Optimization

The Navy remains committed to the long-term strategic goals in our Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Program (SIOP), and we are grateful for the Committee's strong support for SIOP. Today, the average age of U.S. naval shipyard facilities and related infrastructure is 62 years. Our four public shipyards are each more than a century old and rapidly degrading, requiring major upgrades and reconfiguration. SIOP provides a strategic roadmap for necessary investments, and when fully executed, will enable three overarching achievements: (1) deliver required dry dock repairs and upgrades to support current and planned future classes of nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and submarines, namely the *Ford*-class and *Virginia*-class with

the *Virginia*-class Payload Module (VPM); (2) optimize workflow within the shipyards through significant changes to their physical layout; and (3) recapitalize industrial plant equipment at all four public shipyards with modern technology that will substantially increase productivity and safety. The Navy remains committed to working with the Congress, Department of Defense leadership, shipyard workforce, impacted communities, regulators, and industry leaders to determine the best path forward for modernization efforts at each shipyard. PB-24 requests \$2.7 billion for SIOP efforts, while we intend to program approximately \$10 billion across the next five years of SIOP activities. In line with maintenance initiatives, planning for placement of facilities and work process is informed by process analysis through Area Development Plans (ADP).

The Navy has made good progress in SIOP execution. At Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, we have completed construction of the super flood basin and commenced construction on two new dry docks. At Norfolk Naval Shipyard, we have completed construction of the Production Training Facility and awarded the contract for repair to berths 40 and 41. At Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, we have just recently awarded the contract for the Dry Dock 3 replacement.

Closely related, the Fleet Readiness Center (FRC) Infrastructure Optimization Plan (FIOP) aims to reduce risk associated with aging FRC infrastructure. The Navy is transforming WWII-era organic aviation depots into modernized Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul repair centers. We are achieving this by streamlining production workflows, upgrading aged equipment and facilities, and implementing digital technologies to increase readiness at a reduced cost. Enterprise master planning is expected to be complete in FY25 and will result in a detailed strategic investment plan that optimizes work flow, increases productivity, and balances investment decisions.

The Navy has made good headway in Fleet Readiness Center Infrastructure Optimization Plan execution as well. At FRC Southeast, we completed renovation of an aircraft hangar in support of 5th generation weapon systems and funded the F-135 engine test cell modification. At FRC Southwest, we funded the CMV-22 aircraft maintenance hangar. Across the enterprise, we completed digital modeling of current production workflows at three aviation depots, and we began optimizing capability and capacity throughout the aviation depots by establishing initial centers of excellence and implementing site-specific workloads.

Shore Infrastructure

PB-24 supports continued sustainment of our shore facilities and prioritizes restoration and modernization of key infrastructure. Shore facilities are critical enablers supporting our operational forces and their families, and many of these facilities are beyond their expected service lives and require recapitalization. We commissioned a Navy utilities system assessment at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam (JBPHH) and received preliminary results. We also commissioned a 5-year recapitalization plan for JBPHH to be completed by November 2023. More broadly, the Navy is developing a 30-year, multi-FYDP, Navy-wide infrastructure plan that anticipates and plans for the needs, requirements, sustainment, and future for shore infrastructure.

Cyber Readiness

Although the readiness of the force has historically been viewed through the lens of the readiness of our people and equipment, the nature of warfare is changing, and we must recognize the importance of cyber readiness in our forces. The Navy's cyberspace superiority vision

identified three main pillars that guide the service: secure, survive, and strike. The "secure" pillar is foundational to the vision and requires constant investment in cybersecurity defenses as adversaries develop new vulnerability exploits. The Navy envisions that it consistently fields best-in-class cybersecurity safeguards, retains its excellent cyber talent and cultivates a professional cybersecurity and cyber-warfighting culture. The "survive" pillar requires training the Navy workforce to respond to cyber-attacks that will inevitably occur. Not only must our people be ready to respond to cyber-attacks, our infrastructure and platforms must be resilient and survivable. Lastly, the "strike" pillar requires the Navy to develop and field capabilities that allow us to operate in cyberspace with lethal effects when authorized. The Navy's PB-24 budget request increases investments in cyber security, cyber resiliency, and cyberspace operations capabilities while adding funds to improve and standardize Cyber Mission Force readiness. We also are creating dedicated cyber-designators and ratings for our officer and enlisted personnel that work in this critical warfare field. Just like the Sailors that man our ships and operate our aircraft, we must cultivate, train, and retain a world-class cyber workforce, both military and civilians, to help us navigate the three pillars of our cybersecurity vision.

Munitions

Our focus on holistic readiness also drives the need to increase our investments in munitions, particularly since this area has historically been a bill payer for other priorities. We continue to work with industry to identify manufacturing challenges and provide investment opportunities to streamline testing and increase production. The Wartime Acquisition and Sustainment Support Plan has helped organize and focus the efforts to overcome this long-term underinvestment, including conducting tabletop exercises with industry to understand barriers to

increased munitions production. We are using multi-year procurement authorities for Standard Missile-6 Block 1A/1B (SM-6), Naval Strike Missile (NSM), Long Range Anti-Ship Missile (LRASM), and Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM), and accelerating production and increasing resiliency across multiple weapon systems, including the Trident II life extension supporting nuclear deterrence, Land Attack Tomahawk, Maritime Strike Tomahawk, AMRAAM, and MK 48 Heavyweight Torpedo (HWT), while maximizing the industrial base by making investments to increase future production capacity on Tomahawk, Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missile-Extended Range (AARGM-ER), and SM-6.

Manning

Faced with historic recruiting challenges, Navy has sharpened our enduring attention to retention efforts. We are implementing a range of mitigations to maximize retention, including: Special Duty Assignment Pay, Special Duty Incentive Pay, Assignment Incentive Pay, and Selective Reenlistment Bonuses. Overall, Navy retention remains healthy.

Similar to the other services, the Navy is experiencing a particularly arduous recruiting environment in FY23 for both Active Duty and Reserve recruiting. We entered this fiscal year with a record low Delayed Entry Pool after exhausting all means to meet the recruiting goal in FY22. In FY23, we expect to miss our active duty recruiting goal 6,000 Sailors short of our 37,700 goal. Additionally, we expect to finish approximately 3,000 Sailors short of our 10,330 recruiting goal for the Navy Reserve. We are using all available levers in FY23 to increase recruiting, while maintaining our standards, including: raising the age ceiling on enlistments to 41 years old for new accessions; allowing up to 20% of new enlisted recruits to be CAT IV recruits by pairing CAT IV individuals with appropriate opportunities in certain ratings; standing

up Navy Recruiting Reserve Command to have a dedicated recruiting force for the reserve component mission along with a Permanent Professional Recruiter designation; increasing the maximum Enlistment Bonus to \$50,000; and implementing a Future Sailor Preparatory Course, modeled after the Army's Future Soldier Preparatory Course, to raise the readiness standards of potential recruits.

The Navy is committed to fully manning sea billets in support of the National Defense Strategy. This goal requires significant recruiting and retention efforts that will take time. The Navy has more than 143,000 Sailors at sea; with a peak of 146,373 in April 2022. The number of Sailors on operational sea duty is significantly higher than in 2017—an increase of 7,000 for all sea duty units. Yet while the overall number of Sailors on operational sea duty continues to increase compared to previous years, thousands of sea billets remain unmanned. To mitigate these gaps at sea and maintain combat lethality, we continue to prioritize manning for deployed and next-to-deploy forces. This tiered approach is being further matured with the implementation of the Surface Manning Experience (SURFMEX) program to better understand each Sailor's training, qualifications, and ship-class history. This program, based on the success of the Aviation Manning Experience (AMEX) program, enables us to fill billets with people who are the best fit for the job.

Sailor and Family Readiness

We remain committed to improving Sailors' quality of service, which includes both quality of life and quality of work. The Navy is significantly increasing investments for Unaccompanied Housing (UH) Restoration and Modernization. To focus our efforts, we initiated

a QR Code program to simplify reporting of maintenance issues, resulting in a 24% improvement in reporting that facilitated more timely resolution of issues.

We are keenly aware of the unique challenges of those Sailors working in the shipyards. PB-24 includes \$258 million of investments in shipyard quality of service. This includes \$11 million for CVN-79 off-ship housing, three parking garages for Sailors and Marines, two multi-use facilities supporting recreation, and building and modernizing berthing barges. We are also pursuing quality of service pilots, such as wider access to Wi-Fi during availabilities.

We remain committed to Navy families and the need to provide affordable, high-quality child-care options. PB-24 adds three new Child Development Centers (CDC) in Hampton Roads, Little Creek, and Guam, and funds continued planning for 12 additional CDCs across the FYDP. We are also increasing capacity within our existing childcare programs through increased fee assistance, increased entry-level salaries for direct-care workers with automatic pay raises at the 18-month mark, Child and Youth Program employee discounts for child care, and inclusion of retention bonuses. Additionally, by including it in our FY24 budget, the implementation of the \$15 per hour minimum pay rate requirements for Federal employees, including Appropriated and Non-Appropriated Fund employees, continues to support and anticipate improvement in recruitment and retention.

We are increasing education opportunities for Sailors across the Fleet. The US Naval Community College provided educational opportunities for over 1,000 Sailors enrolled in Associate Degree programs, with over 60 earning certificates to date. The US Naval Community College is increasing student enrollment to 3,500 by the end of 2023. These are core elements of developing and educating our future warfighters and leaders.

The Navy is dedicated to creating a culture intolerant of sexual assault and sexual harassment. We are actively implementing the Department of Defense's Prevention Plan of Action 2.0. We continue to focus on: increasing reporting and decreasing prevalence of sexual assault through integrated primary prevention; refining response capabilities; treating victims with compassion; providing quality care; and addressing the emerging challenges associated with male reporting of sexual assault. Incorporating recommendations from the Independent Review Commission (IRC) on Sexual Assault in the Military, as approved by the Secretary of Defense, the Navy has implemented meaningful policy changes, including: (1) in formal sexual harassment cases, requiring the investigating officer to come from outside the command of the complainant and the subject; (2) ensuring that a victim who contacts a helping professional either must receive services from that office or get a "warm hand-off" to the appropriate service provider, known as the "No Wrong Door Policy"; and (3) hiring more than 225 full-time prevention personnel (FY22-FY25). We also implemented "Safe to Report," ensuring a victim who has reported sexual assault cannot be disciplined for minor collateral misconduct. Finally, the Navy has stood up the Office of Special Trial Counsel in preparation for changes to the military justice system enacted in NDAA 2022 that will transfer jurisdiction for sexual assault, domestic violence, and other covered offenses in 2023 and sexual harassment in 2025 to independent specialized prosecutors.

We continue to prioritize access to the full continuum of mental health resources for our Sailors, aiming to utilize the right care, at the right level, at the right time. Our Sailors receive mental health services in primary care, specialty clinics, and via virtual health platforms, and we continue to expand our virtual options. Valuing the importance of giving Sailors access to mental health resources, over 36 percent of our active duty mental health providers are now assigned to

sea-going commands. We are investing in efforts that will help Sailors earlier, before there is a crisis when able, and certainly after they report an issue. To this end, we are providing training to improve resiliency and prevent suicide, while expanding Operational Virtual Mental Health, assigning more Chaplains to fleet units, enhancing mental health interventions, and embedding mental health experts where able. We also continue to improve coordination to ensure Sailors are directed to the most appropriate service to meet their mental health needs. In February 2023, we published a comprehensive Mental Health Playbook designed to assist Navy leaders in preventing, mitigating, and addressing mental health issues across the Fleet.

Conclusion

The Navy's warfighting advantage is built on the readiness of our platforms, our places, our partners, and, most importantly, our people – the Sailors and civilians who stand ready to fight and win. In the face of adversaries that work every day to out-build and out-gun us, our Sailors and civilians are able to out-think, out-work, and out-fight any adversary. The talent standing the watch is unmatched, by any metric. This all-volunteer force, the loyal Americans who raised their hands to support and defend our Constitution, reflects the Navy's core values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment, and the fighting spirit of our Nation.

Your Navy is tackling complex and multifaceted challenges, focusing on both the present and the future. It is essential that the positive momentum of the FY23 budget continues, so that we can support the peacetime promotion our national security interests and remain ready for prompt and sustained combat.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and look forward to working closely with you in the future.
