

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION
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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
OVERSIGHT OF MILITARY RECRUITING EFFORTS FOR FY24
DECEMBER 6, 2023**

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Introduction

Chairwoman Warren, Ranking Member Scott, and distinguished members of the Personnel Subcommittee thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Navy's most important strategic asset – our people. The health, lethality, and capability of America's Navy are critical; the linchpin remains access to high-quality and motivated future Sailors to meet the current and future mission of your United States Navy. With a competitive labor market, a shrinking pool of eligible candidates, and a low propensity to serve, recruiting future Sailors has become increasingly difficult. Despite the challenges, our nationwide team of dedicated recruiters remains focused on attracting the best quality candidates from every zip code to sustain America's maritime strength worldwide, and our Navy continues to develop and implement innovative initiatives to build our force.

Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Navy Recruiting Performance

The U.S. Navy's FY 2023 recruitment goals were 37,700 for active-duty enlisted Sailors and 8,390 for reserve enlisted Sailors. As of Sept. 30, 2023, the Navy recruited 30,236 (80.2%) active-duty Sailors and 6,342 (75.5%) reserve Sailors. The U.S Navy's FY 2023 recruitment goals were 2,532 for active-duty officers and 1,940 for reserve officers. As of Sept. 30, 2023, the Navy recruited 2,080 (82.1%) active-duty officers and 1,167 (60.2%) reserve officers.

Despite a challenging and competitive environment, our talented recruiters made tremendous efforts in FY 2023. These efforts resulted in 6,000 more contracted future Sailors than the previous year, and helped us close the gap on our forecasted miss by 40 percent. We are pleased with the quality of recruits who joined the Navy, and these future Sailors share our core values of honor, courage, and commitment.

Status of Meeting Navy Recruiting Goals

Initiatives that began in FY 2023 have carried into FY 2024 as the Navy builds more pathways of opportunity for all qualified individuals who choose to serve. The complexity of our current environment forced us to think creatively and challenge assumptions. Outreach and engagement opportunities continue to increase awareness about the Navy, its people, and its mission, while Navy recruiters and Sailors across the Fleet continue to connect with qualified future Sailors who desire to join the Navy and are motivated to serve in defense of our Nation.

The Navy entered FY 2024 in a similar posture to FY 2023, with approximately 12% Delayed Entry Program(DEP) and a recruiting goal of 40,600 for active-duty enlisted Sailors and 7,619 for reserve enlisted Sailors. The Navy's FY 2024 recruiting goals for officers are 2,807 for active duty and 1,785 for reserve officers. As of Nov. 20th, the Navy recruited 9,044 active-duty enlisted Sailors, 870 reserve enlisted Sailors, 520 active-duty officers and 133 reserve officers.

Factors Impacting Recruiting Efforts

The unemployment rate has remained near historic lows through 2022 and 2023. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows unemployment at 3.9 percent in October 2023. Persistent labor shortages in some industries and an aging population are likely to continue to contribute to a relatively tight labor market. Therefore, we do not anticipate much relief regarding recruiting challenges.

Like FY 2022, the FY 2023 recruiting environment was one of the toughest in recent history. The propensity to serve remains low. According to a Department of Defense Youth Poll from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) Joint Advertising Market Research & Studies (JAMRS), the propensity to serve among youth in our primary target demographic (16-21 years old) has been declining since the Fall of 2018, decreasing from 13% in Fall 2018 to 9% in Fall

2022. The decline from Summer 2022 to Fall 2022 was primarily driven by a decrease in male youth propensity from 17% to 10% in Fall 2022. Additionally, the proportion of youth who reported never having considered serving in the military increased from 49% to 54% between Summer 2022 and Fall 2022, consistent with recent historic highs for this metric.

Of note, of the 33 million personnel in the 17 to 24-year-old population, 16.5 million are considered high academic quality, meaning that they have As or Bs, with an estimated 50 or higher on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) and only 4.6 million (14%) are considered high academic quality and eligible for service, which means that these individuals have no disqualifying medical or legal issue. Finally, 300,000 have a propensity to serve (1% of the total population). Aggregate military propensity is lower today than it has been since 2007. Additionally, the latest from JAMRS “State of the Market” study (released October 2023), shows the proportion of youth (ages 16-24) with a parent who has served in the military decreased from 40% in 1995 to 12% in 2022. Furthermore, the 2022 College Market Study (released September 2023) shows that a plurality of college market youth perceive that the benefits of college outweigh the costs despite the financial burden of attending college.

Initiatives in Navy Recruiting

Navy Recruiting is a priority for senior leadership and is an all-hands effort throughout the Service. Last month, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) released a message to the Fleet, specifically for command leadership, regarding the continued war for talent. She charged every command in the Navy with finding, coaching, and mentoring at least one quality recruit candidate this FY. Additionally, the Secretary of the Navy sent more than 2,000 letters to high school principals to encourage recruiter collaboration and promote a positive view of military service.

Navy Recruiting Command (NRC) continues to emphasize updating recruitment policies and expanding the eligible population by opening the aperture of qualified individuals without lowering standards. By carefully evaluating individual circumstances and granting waivers where appropriate, we have been able to tap into a broader talent pool, including individuals who may have previously been disqualified due to minor infractions or medical conditions. This flexibility has also helped increase our recruiting attainment and allowed us to consider candidates with unique skills and experiences that greatly benefit the Navy. The expanded policies, waivers, new initiatives, and pilot programs have been instrumental in increasing our pool of eligible candidates.

Policy and Waiver Initiatives:

- **Category IV:** Allows for up to 20% of total accessions who attain an Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) score of 10-30 but have qualifying line scores to join the Navy Delayed Entry Program (DEP).
- **Positive Drug and Alcohol Tests (PosDATs):** Expanded PosDAT waiver authority by changing the wait window for retesting from 90 days down to 60 days for marijuana and THC. Applicants were only allowed to retest on the 91st day after failing the DAT/receiving a PosDAT; however, they can now retest on the 61st day after receiving the PosDAT.
- **Tattoos:** Allows applicants to enter and serve in the Navy with tattoos on the body including the neck and ears, regardless of location or size (on a case-by-case basis), except the head, face, and scalp.
- **Age:** Increased age for active and reserve accessions, who must now report to Recruit Training Command prior to their 42nd birthday (an increase from 39).

- **Single Parent Policy:** Allows for waivers for dependency status for active and reserve enlistment of unmarried individuals with custody of dependents under the age of 18.
- **Tier II:** Authorized the contracting and accessing of Tier II applicants with an AFQT score of 31 or above. Tier II applicants are non-high school graduates with a GED and previously were only accessed with a 50 or greater AFQT.

Recruiting Initiatives:

- **Recruiting Operations Center (ROC):** Launched at the beginning of this FY, the ROC oversees daily visualization and management of recruiting operations across the recruiting enterprise. The ROC was established to elevate barriers and efficiently reallocate resources to points and times of need through daily visualization and management of production that results in increased Net Contracts Attained (NCA).
- **Every Sailor a Recruiter (ESaR):** A program for currently serving Sailors to share their experience and provide leads of interested applicants to Navy recruiting.
- **Navy Recruiting Reserve Command (NRRC):** Established to focus specific recruiting efforts on the prior service mission.
- **Increased Marketing and Advertising (M&A):** Increased budget to improve positive public perception of Navy service in the long term.
- **Increased Recruiter Manning:** Enables the Navy to have a greater reach and engagement with the youth population across the recruiting Nation.
- **Enlistment Bonus:** Leveraged to attract high-quality recruits to fill high demand rates. Future Sailors can earn up to \$140,000 in incentives (by completing requirements for critical jobs in the Navy).

In addition to the policy levers and initiatives, the Navy’s monetary incentives have enabled us to influence the placement of shippers and remain in contention with other Services and the civilian market. Current bonuses offered to candidates include:

- Up to \$140K in combined enlistment incentives:
 - \$75K Enlistment Bonus Ceiling – Expanded opportunities for future Sailors to reach or get close to the ceiling
 - \$65K Loan Repayment Program
- Currently offering \$35K/\$25K/\$10K for Active Component (AC) Future Sailors (FS)
- \$25K for select Training and Administration of Reserve (TAR) FS.

Recruiting Modernization

The Navy continues to employ the Forged by the Sea digital M&A campaign with success in reaching all demographics. In FY 2023, NRC communicated this value proposition via its latest advertising campaigns, including “Never,” the newest iteration of the Forged by the Sea campaign. With just 2% of eligible prospects indicating their motivation to serve, the remaining 98% say “never” to a Navy career before exploring the possibilities. This iteration addresses propensity directly by highlighting all the things Sailors never thought they would do or achieve if they had not joined the Navy. It shows the breadth and depth of opportunities in the Navy while speaking directly to our target audience's common reservations about the Navy. The campaign captures authentic, relevant, and compelling content featuring real Sailors while emphasizing inclusion and diversity.

We use specific targeting and content strategies to appeal to a diversity of demographics and demonstrate what a Navy career can do for them. For example, the “Make Your Name” video series, which highlights empowering stories of female Sailors and a YouTube masthead

takeover during Women’s History Month, reached nearly half of all women aged 18-24 in the United States.

A focused budget has immediately impacted recruiting efforts by generating interest and online activity via digital advertisements. Additionally, Navy leveraged additional M&A resources to purchase media that speaks to our target audience and talks to the influencers who can provide added value by reinforcing potential candidates’ career decisions. Specific examples include:

- They executed 30-second broadcast TV commercial during the Super Bowl in 16 major markets throughout the U.S., when viewers were expected to watch and talk about ads.
- Streaming platforms: Hulu, YouTube TV, and Sling, to include ads during peak viewing times, such as March Madness.

In FY 2023, we continued cultivating relationships and connections with professional organizations whose members share an aligned interest with the Navy. Additionally, the Navy ensures we are listening to feedback, identifying blind spots in our outreach initiatives, and continuing to penetrate markets that may have gone untapped in the past. The Navy also strives to serve multicultural students and communities through programs like Promotional Days, Junior Officer Diversity Outreach, and “Divine Nine” Ambassador Program, leveraging the Navy’s built-in community of active-duty fraternity and sorority members.

Accessions Supply Chain

The persistent recruiting challenges make exploring creative solutions to reduce attrition in Navy accession training more important. In response, the Naval Service Training Command (NSTC) domain created initiatives to give recruits more training opportunities while broadening the Navy’s talent pool. An expanded Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) waiver policy, the use of alternate cardio during physical fitness tests, receptive acclimation at Recruit Training Command (RTC), and the newly created Future Sailor Preparatory Course (FSPC) (Physical and Academic) have demonstrated positive results in production of enlisted accessions to the Fleet.

Expanded THC Waiver Policy

The expanded THC waiver policy significantly diminished the number of THC positive attrites while meeting changing societal norms. Previously, only recruits who admitted use of THC could receive a waiver for a positive drug test. In contrast, recruits who tested positive but failed to admit did not receive a waiver and were separated. The expanded THC waiver process includes recruits who test positive for THC, admit to such usage, and then obtain a waiver prior to graduation once they go through a rigorous medical dependency screening process. Recruits only attrite due to a positive THC test if they are medically deemed to be dependent. As a result, only 31 recruits attrited in FY 2023, compared to 450 in FY 2022.

Alternate Cardio

The utilization of alternate cardio at RTC, which aligned policy with Fleet cardio options, minimized Physical Readiness Test (PRT) failures at RTC, yielding more Sailors to the Fleet. Historically, recruits were required to complete the 1.5 mile run modality for the cardio portion of their official Physical Fitness Assessment (PFA). Recruits who failed the PRT entered a remedial fitness program and would retake the PRT, including the 1.5 mile run. In FY 2022, 302 recruits attrited due to PRT failures. Under the new policy, recruits who fail their initial attempt of the run portion of the PRT can now utilize the bike for their second attempt and receive three additional opportunities to meet PRT standards before graduation. As a result, in FY 2023, only one recruit attrited due to PRT failure.

Receptive Acclimation at RTC

Attrition due to psychological reasons was the leading cause of attrition in FY 2023. RTC is looking at methods to further reduce this type of attrition at the early stages of training. A redesign of training during Processing Days (P-Days) aims to increase teamwork and cultural acclimation. Instead of the shock and awe approach, recruits experience a steady increase in training intensity throughout their 10-week training. In this process, the stress level is tailored to the specific training phase, establishing a setting where recruits can thrive. RTC emphasizes physical safety, opportunities, and skills to excel, associating setbacks with long-term growth. Early analysis has demonstrated that the approach has positively impacted early attrition.

Future Sailor Prep Course

One of the most notable new programs implemented at RTC is the FSPC. Modeled off the Army's Future Soldier Prep Course program, FSPC was created to broaden the recruitment talent pool of future Sailors through fitness and academic remediation. FSPC provides more recruits opportunities to serve and become eligible for an expanded number of ratings.

Recruits in the fitness track endure an initial 3-week fitness and nutrition curriculum to meet Navy body fat standards. After the initial three weeks, FSPC-Physical Fitness Skills Development (FSPC-FSD) recruits have up to 90 days on a 3-week rolling basis to meet RTC standards. As of 20 November, 370 recruits have been enrolled in FSPC- Fitness, and 280 have graduated from RTC.

The academic track is in its pre-pilot Beta phase, with a pilot set to start in January 2024. Recruits participating in the FSPC-Academic Beta go through a 3-week Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) tutoring curriculum. The early stages of the Beta testing (103 students enrolled; 58 completed the program) shown promising results with recruits increasing their ASVAB score by an average of 10 points, allowing for expanded job opportunities in critically needed rates to reduce gaps at sea.

Conclusion

Attracting quality future Sailors is the key to maintaining our advantage at sea. Despite the recent and future challenges, your Navy team stands ready to take advantage of the opportunity to share positive military service experiences with future recruits and those who influence them. We are grateful for this committee's partnership in helping to address these challenges. We remain committed to working with the Congress to recruit, develop and retain a ready and lethal force. On behalf of the men and women of the United States Navy and their families, thank you for your sustained commitment and unwavering support.