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ALWAYS READY: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A UNITED STATES COAST GUARD MEMBER

(119–47)

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

SEPTEMBER 16, 2026

Printed for the use of the
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure



Available online at: https://www.govinfo.gov/committee/house-transportation?path=/browsecommittee/chamber/house/committee/transportation

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

65–555 PDF WASHINGTON : 2026

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Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
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SEPTEMBER 11, 2026

SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER

TO: Members, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
FROM: Staff, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
RE: Subcommittee Hearing on "*Always Ready: A Day in the Life of a United States Coast Guard Member*"

I. PURPOSE

The Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure will meet on Wednesday, September 16, 2026, at 1:00 p.m. ET in 2167 Rayburn House Office Building to receive testimony on "*Always Ready: A Day in the Life of a United States Coast Guard Member*." The Subcommittee will hear testimony from Vice Admiral Nathan A. Moore, Deputy Commandant for Operations, United States Coast Guard, and Master Chief Phillip N. Waldron, Master Chief Petty Officer of the United States Coast Guard (Coast Guard or Service). Additionally, prior to commencing the hearing, the Subcommittee will host a Member lunch, featuring Coast Guard enlisted members who will discuss their experiences in the Service. These enlisted members will not participate as witnesses at the hearing.

II. BACKGROUND

The Coast Guard has primary responsibility to "enforce or assist in the enforcement of all applicable Federal laws on, under, and over the high seas and waters subject to the jurisdiction of the United States;" ensure the safety of life and property at sea; carry out domestic and international icebreaking activities; and "maintain a state of readiness to assist in the defense of the United States, including when functioning as a specialized service in the Navy" upon the declaration of war or when the President directs.[1] Coast Guard personnel are responsible for assisting mariners in distress, protecting and defending more than 100,000 miles of United States coastline and inland waterways, and safeguarding an economic region covering 4.5 million square miles.[2]

The Coast Guard offers 24 unique career paths for its enlisted recruits, including careers in aviation, cyber, afloat, intelligence, and Information Technology (IT). The newest rating is Robotics Mission Specialist, announced at the end of 2025 and es-

[1] 14 U.S.C. § 102.
[2] U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO–23–106750, COAST GUARD RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CHALLENGES PERSIST (May 2023), *available at* https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-106750.pdf [hereinafter 2023 Recruitment and Retention Report].

tablished in June 2026.[3] Coast Guard Officers can enter numerous career paths, broadly divided into afloat, aviation, engineering, healthcare, prevention, response, and support opportunities.[4] At every rank and across job functions, Coast Guard service members perform extraordinary tasks every day in their service to the Nation. Some examples include search and rescue operations in life threatening conditions that resulted in 5,220 lives saved in 2025 and perilous high-speed drug interceptions that resulted in 511,000 pounds of narcotics seized over the same period.[5] The Service also conducts less visible roles, such as supporting the United States scientific community through ice breaking operations in the most remote regions on Earth.[6]

Last year, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act provided nearly $25 billion of procurement funding to rebuild the Service's fleet of cutters, aircraft and shoreside facilities. Historic annual funding shortfalls and recruitment challenges, particularly among enlisted personnel, have hindered the Service and limited its ability to carry out its 11 assigned statutory missions. After years of service member shortages, the Coast Guard met its recruiting goals in 2024 and 2025.[7] This was a significant shift, and the Service grew by more than 1,100 military members in 2025.[8]

As part of the Trump Administration's Force Design 2028 plan, the Coast Guard has stated a goal of growing by 15,000 military members by the end of 2028.[9] In support of this effort, the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2025 authorizes the Coast Guard to grow its military strength by 10,500 personal over the next two Fiscal Years, contingent on sufficient operations funding.[10] In 2023, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that the 55,000 civilian, reserve and activity duty military personnel serving in the Coast Guard was 4,800 members short (approximately an eight percent shortfall) and that it had missed its recruiting targets for the previous four fiscal years in a row.[11] A 2025 GAO study identified improvements in 2024 consisting of "initiating a recruiter incentive pay program, offering a new career track for recruiting specialists, and increasing recruiter support resources," but also noted ongoing gaps and challenges, including data collection and analysis to support evidence-based decision making and persistent information technology issues.[12] Due at least in part to previous years of recruiting struggles, the Service reduced its capabilities by closing stations and laying up cutters to align the Coast Guard's force structure with its manpower realities.[13] In order to overcome such challenges and maintain progress long-term, the Service must have the resources to make appropriate investments into both its personnel and the infrastructure that supports them.

III. COAST GUARD PERSONNEL

ENLISTED PERSONNEL

Enlisted personnel in the Coast Guard range in rank from Seaman Recruit to Master Chief Petty Officer. Enlisted service members make up the majority of Coast

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[3] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Careers, available at* https://www.gocoastguard.com/careers; UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Coast Guard Investigative Service (CGIS) Personnel, available at* https://www.uscg.mil/Resources/Coast-Guard-Investigative-Service/Personnel/; UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Learn about the Coast Guard's new rating: Talent Acquisition Specialist, available at* https://www.mycg.uscg.mil/News/Article/3650962/learn-about-the-coast-guards-new-rating-talent-acquisition-specialist/; UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *What you need to know about the new Robotics Mission Specialist (RMS) rating*, https://www.mycg.uscg.mil/News/Article/4355502/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-new-robotics-mission-specialist-rms-rating/.

[4] *Id.*

[5] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *U.S. Coast Guard Highlights Historic Operational Successes in 2025, available at* https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/4374170/us-coast-guard-highlights-historic-operational-successes-in-2025/

[6] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD ACADEMY, *Coast Guard Roles and Missions, available at* https://uscga.edu/careers/roles-and-missions/.

[7] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Coast Guard exceeds fiscal year 2025 recruiting goals, achieves highest numbers since 1991, available at* https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/4329282/coast-guard-exceeds-fiscal-year-2025-recruiting-goals-achieves-highest-numbers/.

[8] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Force Design 2028 Initial Update January 2026, available at* https://www.uscg.mil/Leadership/Commandants-Initiatives/Force-Design/.

[9] *Id.*

[10] Pub. L. No. 119–60.

[11] 2023 Recruitment and Retention Report *supra* note 2.

[12] U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO–25–107224, COAST GUARD PROGRESS MADE TO ADDRESS RECRUITING CHALLENGES BUT ADDITIONAL ACTIONS NEEDED (May 2025), *available at* https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-106750.pdf [hereinafter 2025 Recruiting Report].

[13] AJ Pulkkinen and Kathy Murray, MYCG, Coast Guard releases Force Alignment plan for AY25, *available at* https://www.mycg.uscg.mil/News/Article/3868496/coast-guard-releases-force-alignment-plan-for-ay25/ (Aug. 9, 2024).

Guard personnel comprising approximately 82 percent of the Service's total workforce.[14] This summary, and the hearing, focus on active-duty enlisted personnel, who make up approximately 67 percent of military personnel in the Coast Guard (i.e., not commissioned officers and not reserve members).[15]

The sole accession point for all enlisted Coast Guard recruits is the United States Coast Guard Training Center Cape May (TRACEN Cape May), located in Cape May, New Jersey. TRACEN Cape May's facilities are nearing the point of total failure. Dilapidated infrastructure, crumbling foundations, and other serious structural issues impact many buildings.[16] Recurrent budget requests and appropriation shortfalls in shoreside infrastructure continue to exacerbate the decline. Of the nearly $25 billion appropriated to the Coast Guard in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act,[17] $425 million will support the TRACEN's modernization process.[18] Additionally, the Service recently opened an additional training center in Birmingham Alabama, which will provide additional capacity for specialized workforce training.[19]

COMMISSIONED PERSONNEL

Commissioned officers in the Coast Guard can enter the Service through one of three programs: the Coast Guard Academy, Officer Candidate School, or as a Direct Commission Officer. All these programs are housed at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut, creating a similar sole accession point for all officers, although the initial training programs differ in length and content.[20]

Like TRACEN Cape May, the Coast Guard Academy has suffered from the Service's historic shoreside funding shortfalls. Crumbling infrastructure, mold, asbestos, and generally antiquated facilities hinder the Service's ability to acquire, recruit, and retain talent in its officer corps.[21] This is particularly true when competing with other Service Academies which possess updated and well-funded facilities, like West Point, the United States Naval Academy, or the United States Air Force Academy.

In 2025, the Coast Guard invested $10 million in improvements to campus security with dorm locks and surveillance cameras.[22] Also in 2025, the Coast Guard initiated a 25-year campus modernization plan.[23]

IV. MAJOR ISSUES FACED BY COAST GUARD PERSONNEL

In May 2024, during the Coast Guard Congressional breakfast, the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard highlighted that service members prioritize housing, access to health and support services, schools, and childcare. These four issues play a pivotal role in recruiting and retention, but are also areas where the Coast Guard has historically struggled to perform well. Certain areas of deficient shoreside infrastructure create further workplace challenges for service members. A 2025 GAO study identified four categories of Coast Guard retention issues: "(1) rotations and support services, (2) work environment and culture, (3) compensation and ca-

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[14] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, MANPOWER REQUIREMENTS PLAN, (Mar. 9, 2023) (on file with Comm.).

[15] 2025 Recruiting Report, *supra* note 12.

[16] Briefing provided by Capt. Dorothy Hernaez, United States Coast Guard, to H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure staff (Mar. 22, 2023) [hereinafter Coast Guard Briefing].

[17] The One Big Beautiful Bill Act, H.R. 1, 119th Cong. (2025) [hereinafter H.R. 1]; *see also*, UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *U.S. Coast Guard receives historic investment to rebuild under President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill, available at* https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/4235481/us-coast-guard-receives-historic-investment-to-rebuild-under-president-trumps-o/ (July 4, 2025).

[18] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Coast Guard awards $400 million contract for historic Training Center Cape May enhancements, available at* https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/4479732/coast-guard-awards-400-million-contract-for-historic-training-center-cape-may-e/ (May 7, 2026).

[19] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *A new horizon for training: Coast Guard welcomes Training Center Birmingham-Southern!*, (July 23, 2026), *available at* https://www.mycg.uscg.mil/News/Article/4553581/a-new-horizon-for-training-coast-guard-welcomes-training-center-birmingham-sout/.

[20] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Officer Careers*, https://www.gocoastguard.com/careers/officer.

[21] Coast Guard Briefing, *supra* note 16.

[22] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *U.S. Coast Guard Academy Upgrades Campus Safety and Security, available at* https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/4221944/us-coast-guard-academy-upgrades-campus-safety-and-security/ (June 20, 2025).

[23] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD ACADEMY, INSTALLATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN (2025) (on file with Comm.).

reer advancement, and (4) incentives and benefits."[24] Military members' relatively frequent reassignment and relocation exacerbates the other challenges, given short notice to register or get on waiting lists for childcare and schools, and to find local healthcare providers in their new locations who accept military health insurance.[25] Several housing and Child Development Centers appear on the Coast Guard's 2026 list of unfunded shoreside infrastructure priorities.[26]

AVAILABILITY OF HOUSING

Approximately 41 percent of Coast Guard units can be found in some of the most remote and most expensive locations within the United States.[27] This includes summer vacation communities where housing is only seasonal or prohibitively expensive. While there are some locations where the Coast Guard provides and maintains housing, the maintenance and upkeep of this housing is often underfunded, creating issues related to lead, mold, asbestos, or other health concerns.[28] For many in the Coast Guard, affordable housing is nearly impossible to find. Compounding the issue, the Coast Guard has not conducted a Service-wide survey of members on their housing experiences and challenges since 2012, resulting in inaccurate and out of date data, hindering the Service's ability to make impactful and informed investments into personnel housing.[29] Still, there has been some recent progress like contracting for 30 new housing units in Kodiak, Alaska,[30] and six new housing units in Seward, Alaska.[31]

ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE

The Coast Guard offers outpatient medical services for its personnel at shore-based outpatient clinics and sickbays, as well as limited services at sickbays on larger Coast Guard vessels. Coast Guard personnel may also obtain medical care through TRICARE, which is administered by the Defense Health Agency (DHA). Through TRICARE, Coast Guard personnel can obtain medical care from military hospitals and clinics or through civilian health care providers.[32] Importantly, Coast Guard active duty personnel and their dependents are more than twice as likely as the personnel and dependents from the other military services to be enrolled in TRICARE Prime Remote, which means they are located more than 50 miles away from a military hospital or clinic.[33] These also tend to be areas that are underserved by civilian providers, according to a 2023 GAO report.[34] This further highlights the challenges that the Service's remote postings have on its personnel.

Challenges, such as clinic staffing shortages, have previously limited the Coast Guard's ability to provide health care to its personnel. Furthermore, as is the case with housing, the remote nature of many Coast Guard bases and stations limits the availability of health care to many members within the Service.[35]

In 2021, the Coast Guard began experimenting with telehealth options during the COVID–19 pandemic, expanding to a pilot video telehealth platform in 2022 and full deployment in September 2023. In August 2026, the Coast Guard announced the imminent rollout of detailed process guidance for telehealth scheduling using the plat-

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[24] U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO–25–107869, ENHANCED DATA AND PLANNING COULD HELP ADDRESS SERVICE MEMBER RETENTION ISSUES (Apr. 2025), *available at* https://www.gao.gov/assets/890/882037.pdf [hereinafter 2025 Retention Report].

[25] *Id.*

[26] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Shoreside Infrastructure and Facilities Projects (FY 2026)* (on file with Comm.).

[27] U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO–24–106388, BETTER FEEDBACK COLLECTION AND INFORMATION COULD ENHANCE HOUSING PROGRAM (Feb. 2024), *available at* https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-24-106388.pdf.

[28] *Id.*

[29] *Id.*

[30] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Coast Guard to build 30 additional housing units, child development center at Base Kodiak*, (June 12, 2026), *available at* https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/4515786/coast-guard-to-build-30-additional-housing-units-child-development-center-at-ba/.

[31] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Coast Guard awards contract for construction of housing and maintenance support facility in Seward, Alaska*, (July 28, 2026), *available at* https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/4557580/coast-guard-awards-contract-for-construction-of-housing-and-maintenance-support/.

[32] U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO–24–106784, COAST GUARD HEALTH CARE: INFORMATION ON TELEHEALTH USAGE, (Apr. 2024) [hereinafter Telehealth Report].

[33] Recruitment and Retention Report, *supra* note 2.

[34] U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO–23–105574, COAST GUARD HEALTH CARE: ADDITIONAL ACTIONS COULD HELP ENSURE BENEFICIARIES' ACCESS (Apr. 2023), *available at* https://www.gao.gov/assets/830/825762.pdf [hereinafter 2023 Beneficiaries' Access to Health Care Report].

[35] Telehealth Report, *supra* note 32.

form My Military Health Scheduled Virtual Visits.[36] However, IT issues, most notably issues pertaining to inconsistent internet connectivity at sea and in remote locations, have plagued the performance of the telehealth program as a viable option service wide.[37]

Another Coast Guard effort to address healthcare access has been helpful, but it also highlights challenges. The Travel to Obtain Healthcare Program is available to service members and their dependents when they are stationed outside of the continental United States (that includes Alaska). The program reimburses travel for non-elective healthcare that is not available locally, including travel costs for an escort if necessary. Within the continental United States, such travel may be reimbursed from unit funds.[38]

One specific healthcare issue that has recently received national attention is the prevalence of brain injuries among service members, particularly service members who work as surfmen assigned to coastal areas with the most severe and punishing sea state.[39] In response to a recent news article, the Coast Guard sent a service-wide email vowing to take "decisive action" to address the issue and announcing a brain health initiative to improve monitoring, reporting, and treatment of brain injuries, but details of this initiative and reporting to Congress are pending.[40]

ACCESS TO SCHOOLS

Access to quality education and childcare is often prohibitively expensive or unavailable in more remote communities where Coast Guard personnel are stationed. Military families frequently cited education issues for their children as a drawback to military service, because children may have to transfer schools up to nine times, on average, before high school graduation.[41] Additionally, military families often rely on public schools, based on where they live, and fewer choices are available to families in rural areas.[42] GAO found that in rural areas, fewer public schools and fewer types of school options (including charter and magnet schools) were available compared to the options for members at units in more highly populated urban areas.[43] For example, in one study rural Coast Guard units had a median of 32 schools located nearby, while urban units had a median of 186 schools nearby.[44] Limitations in educational opportunities hinder the Service's ability to retain personnel.

ACCESS TO CHILDCARE

In 2020, the rising cost of childcare nationwide was among the most formidable challenges facing Coast Guard families.[45] The Coast Guard operates proportionally fewer on-base Child Development Centers compared to other military services, so most eligible Coast Guard personnel receive fee assistance to help them obtain childcare through community-based providers.[46] The Coast Guard's nine existing facilities[47] can only provide on-base care to approximately 700 children.[48] In 2022, 300 children were on the waitlist for Coast Guard facilities.[49] The Coast Guard serves the other 82 percent of enrolled children through community-based providers

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[36] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, ALCOAST message 245/46, (Aug. 7, 2026), *available at* https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDHSCG/bulletins/4240af5.

[37] Telehealth Report, *supra* note 32.

[38] 2023 Beneficiaries' Access to Health Care Report, *supra* note 32.

[39] Dave Philips, *Rescue Boat Crews Show Signs of Brain Injuries, but Coast Guard Isn't Looking*, N.Y. TIMES, July 30, 2026, *available at* https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/30/us/coast-guard-rescue-boat-surfmen-brain-injury.html.

[40] Dave Philips, *Coast Guard Vows to Protect Crews From Brain Injuries Caused by Rough Seas*, N.Y. TIMES, (July 31, 2026), *available at* https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/31/us/31nat-coast-guard-brain-injury-boat-waves-surfmen.html.

[41] 2023 Recruitment and Retention Report, *supra* note 2.

[42] *Id.*

[43] *Id.*

[44] *Id.*

[45] *Id.*

[46] U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO–22–105262, MILITARY CHILDCARE: COAST GUARD IS TAKING STEPS TO INCREASE ACCESS FOR FAMILIES (June 2022), *available at* https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-105262 [hereinafter Childcare Report].

[47] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Child Development Centers Contact List, available at* https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/Assistant-Commandant-for-Human-Resources-CG-1/Health-Safety-and-Work-Life-CG-11/Office-of-Work-Life-CG-111/Child-Care/Child-Development-Centers-Contact-List/ (last visited Aug. 25. 2026).

[48] 2023 Recruitment and Retention Report, *supra* note 2.

[49] *Id.*

who participate in the Service's Fee Assistance program.[50] Comparatively, the Department of Defense is able to serve 77 percent of enrolled children in its own on-base Child Development Centers, limiting their reliance on outside providers.[51] The Coast Guard has attempted to address this shortfall by building four new Child Development Centers.[52] It has also centralized and updated online information to help families find child care in their communities.[53]

The reliance on community-based providers has consequences for Coast Guard Personnel. In remote areas, there may not be sufficient community providers available or the wait list is exceedingly long, and since members are often only informed of a new duty station months before transfer, there may not be sufficient time to apply and be accepted.

Even on-base Child Development Centers face difficulties in recruiting and certifying childcare providers. For example, in late June 2024, Coast Guard Base Kodiak informed 16 families that due to staffing shortages, their dependents would be disenrolled from the on-base Child Development Center.[54] Additionally, it could not accommodate enrollment for inbound members.[55] This notification was made at the height of summer, when families were moving to or from the Coast Guard base at Kodiak, Alaska, and needed reliable childcare. Despite its large size, even Base Kodiak could not provide adequate childcare for its members. This difficulty is further heightened because Kodiak is a remote island, with limited childcare options.

SHORESIDE INFRASTRUCTURE DEFICIENCIES

Some shoreside infrastructure issues directly affect service member working conditions. For example, Aviation Survival Technicians (specialized rescue swimmers who often deploy from Coast Guard helicopters into violent seas)[56] conduct their training in the community Morale, Well-Being & Recreation pool at the tent-covered Petaluma, California Training Center[57] since damage to their dedicated training pool in Elizabeth City, North Carolina forced their hasty relocation in 2022 while the pool is renovated.[58] During a visit to Training Center Yorktown in July of 2026, Committee Staff observed service members performing maintenance on a small boat outdoors in extreme heat, working conditions that the Coast Guard would not tolerate from a contractor.

SUMMARY

While all branches of the military face recruiting and retention challenges, due to its small size the Coast Guard feels shortfalls more acutely. Moreover, it can be particularly challenging for the Coast Guard to recruit because it is smaller, less well known, and less well funded than the other military services.[59] As highlighted by the stories of the enlisted members invited to the Members lunch before the hearing, the Coast Guard workforce is vital to accomplishing the Service's 11 statutory missions and safeguarding the National security of the United States.

V. WITNESSES

- Vice Admiral Nathan A. Moore, Deputy Commandant for Operations, United States Coast Guard
- Master Chief Phillip N. Waldron, Master Chief Petty Officer, United States Coast Guard

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[50] Childcare Report, *supra* note 46.
[51] *Id.*
[52] *Id.*
[53] *Id.*
[54] Email from CDR Justin Nadolny to H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure Staff (June 19, 2024), (on file with Comm.).
[55] *Id.*
[56] UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, *Careers—Aviation Survival Technician, available at* https://www.gocoastguard.com/careers/enlisted/ast.
[57] TRACEN Petaluma MWR Aquatic Center, *available at* https://www.petalumamwr.com/aquatic-center.
[58] Janki Patel, *Rescue swimmers train in California while North Carolina training center is renovated*, MYCG, (Mar. 22, 2022), *available at* https://www.mycg.uscg.mil/News/Article/2967652/rescue-swimmers-train-in-california-while-north-carolina-training-center-is-ren/.
[59] 2023 Recruitment and Retention Report, *supra* note 2.

ALWAYS READY: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A UNITED STATES COAST GUARD MEMBER

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2026

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND
MARITIME TRANSPORTATION,
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 1:05 p.m., in Room 2167, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Mike Ezell (Chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. EZELL. The Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation will come to order.

I ask unanimous consent that the chairman be authorized to declare a recess at any time during today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

I also ask unanimous consent that Members not on the subcommittee be permitted to sit with the subcommittee at today's hearing and ask questions.

Without objection, so ordered.

As a reminder, if Members insert a document into the record, please also email it to DocumentsTI@mail.house.gov.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement for 5 minutes.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. MIKE EZELL OF MISSISSIPPI, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

Mr. EZELL. Today, our subcommittee meets to highlight the extraordinary work the enlisted men and women of the Coast Guard do day in and day out to save lives at sea, interdict drugs and migrants, keep our maritime transportation system safe and reliable, and perform all of their other primary duties. That's a lot.

I welcome our witnesses this afternoon: Vice Admiral Nathan Moore, Deputy Commandant of the Coast Guard for Operations, and Master Chief Phillip Waldron, Master Chief Petty Officer of the United States Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard's record of achievement is a testament to the skill and bravery of its servicemembers. Just last year, the Service saved over 5,220 lives and assisted nearly 20,000 people. Also last year, the Coast Guard interdicted 511,000 pounds of drugs, stopping 193 million potentially lethal doses from reaching our shores. These missions are carried out largely by the Coast Guard's enlisted workforce. We ask a lot of these enlisted servicemembers

who make up a significant majority of the Coast Guard's Active Duty military population.

Just before this hearing, members of the subcommittee had the opportunity to speak with four members of the Coast Guard enlisted workforce over lunch. Those men and women represented different specialties across the Service. I am sure I can speak for everyone on the subcommittee when I tell you these are impressive individuals, and we applaud their service. Thank you.

Despite their remarkable achievements, the Coast Guard workforce faces challenges in accessing adequate housing, education, and childcare. I had the privilege to travel this August with the Coast Guard. I went to New Orleans, Pascagoula, Pensacola, and Key West. To be quite frank, I was horrified to see how neglected our servicemembers are. They live and work and protect communities across every corner of this Nation, including in some of the most remote parts where it can be difficult to develop infrastructure.

Beyond that, we have boats that are beyond their planned service life, infrastructure dating back to World War II, and planes and helicopters which are way beyond their planned service life. We even have rescue swimmers who train in a recreational pool because their own training facility suffered a catastrophic failure, and Coasties who do boat maintenance outdoors in uncovered extreme heat.

This year, we were also reminded of the physical risk that comes with these missions by the death of a rescue swimmer in the line of duty and reports of potentially debilitating brain injuries among boat crews operating in heavy surf.

Vice Admiral Moore, I am sure you will agree that, as a Nation, we owe our Coasties adequate living conditions, world-class training, proper working conditions, and if they are injured on the job, the confidence that they will be taken care of.

While shoreside facilities have fallen into disrepair, impacting the readiness of the Service, I am hopeful that the investments made with the One Big Beautiful Bill Act will begin to improve conditions. But true progress will only happen through annual appropriations at sustainable levels. Neither the budget request nor the Appropriations Committee provide that sustainable level. I am afraid that without continued investment at the levels needed, we will see a catastrophic failure of the Coast Guard's assets. I look forward to hearing from both of our witnesses how the Service is working to improve conditions for the workforce.

I am also glad to see the Coast Guard respond so quickly to the realization of brain injury risk among crew, but many questions remain. I am interested in hearing in greater detail the Coast Guard's response and how you plan to restore the confidence of your operators.

Thank you again for joining us. I look forward to your testimony.

[Mr. Ezell's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Mike Ezell of Mississippi, Chairman, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation

Today, our subcommittee meets to highlight the extraordinary work the enlisted men and women of the Coast Guard do, day in and day out, to save lives at sea, interdict drugs and migrants, keep our maritime transportation system safe and reliable, and perform all of their other primary duties. I welcome our witnesses for this afternoon's hearing: Vice Admiral Nathan Moore, Deputy Commandant of the Coast Guard for Operations; and Master Chief Phillip Waldron, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard's record of achievement is a testament to the skill and bravery of its servicemembers. Just last year, the Service saved 5,220 lives and assisted nearly 20,000 people. Also last year, the Coast Guard interdicted 511,000 pounds of drugs—stopping 193 million potentially lethal doses from reaching our shores. These missions are carried out largely by the Coast Guard's enlisted workforce. We ask a lot of those enlisted servicemembers who make up a significant majority of the Coast Guard's active duty military population.

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I am also glad to see the Coast Guard respond so quickly to the realization of brain injury risks among crew, but many questions remain. I am interested in hearing greater detail of the Coast Guard's response, and how you plan to restore the confidence of your operators.

Thank you again for joining us. I look forward to your testimony.

Mr. EZELL. I would also like to acknowledge the mother of an enlisted member who joined us for lunch, Ms. Jennifer Matuska. Okay, Ms. Jennifer. Hey, I see you. Okay. Thank you for joining us today. Thank you very much. I hope you enjoyed your time us with.

All right. Thank you again for joining us.

I now recognize Ranking Member Carbajal for an opening statement for 5 minutes.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SALUD O. CARBAJAL OF CALIFORNIA, RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Chairman Ezell, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today. And thank you to the enlisted members that joined us today for lunch for a good dialogue about the service that you provide and all the challenges associated with that. Thank you for your service and, of course, the parents that are here supporting you today.

The Coast Guard asks a great deal of its people. Servicemembers are expected to answer the call at a moment's notice, operate in some of the most challenging environments in the country, and carry out dangerous missions that protect American lives, our communities, and our economic security.

Today, we have an opportunity to put the people behind those missions front and center.

Over the years, I have visited Coast Guard units across the country and overseas to see their work up close. Those visits have given me an even greater appreciation for the professionalism, skill, and commitment that Coasties bring to the job every single day.

The missions they perform are essential. Coast Guard personnel conduct search and rescue, interdict illegal drugs, protect our marine environment, safeguard our fisheries, and help ensure that our maritime transportation system remains safe and secure. They do this while operating around the clock and often far from home. That is an extraordinary responsibility, and it demands an extraordinary workforce.

As ranking member of this subcommittee, along with our chairman, I am proud to be an advocate for the Coast Guard. But being an advocate means more than recognizing the importance of the mission. It means making sure the people responsible for carrying out that mission have what they need to succeed.

That starts with the basics.

A servicemember should always be able to find a safe and affordable place to live. I know that this is challenging given that 41 percent of Coast Guard units are located in some of the most remote and expensive areas of the United States. I have seen this challenge firsthand in my own district on the Central Coast of California, where Coast Guard families have faced both high cost of housing and unacceptable, shameful conditions in Coast Guard-provided housing.

I personally visited Coast Guard housing in Santa Barbara twice after learning about serious problems, including mold, persistent water issues, and deteriorating floors. In fact, one Coast Guard member fell through the shower floor because moisture and mold had caused the floor to deteriorate. No servicemember or their families should have to choose between paying more than they can afford to live near their duty station and living in housing that is unsafe or unhealthy.

And this is not simply a quality-of-life issue. When Coast Guard members cannot afford to live near their units, or when the housing provided to them is not safe, it can directly affect readiness, morale, and the Service's ability to retain the people that it needs.

For the families stationed in these communities, the cost of serving can extend well beyond the demands of the job itself. Housing costs can make living near a duty station unrealistic. Long commutes can take valuable time away from family. Access to medical care can require significant travel, and finding affordable childcare can be especially difficult for families whose schedules do not fit the traditional 9 to 5 workday.

We need to recognize these challenges for what they are: readiness issues. When a Coast Guard member is worried about whether their family can make rent, whether their child has access to daycare, or whether their family can see a doctor, that affects morale. It affects quality of life, and over time, it can affect whether talented people choose to join the Service or whether experienced members decide to stay.

We cannot ask Coast Guard personnel to make extraordinary sacrifices while overlooking the everyday challenges facing their families. That is why continued investment in the Coast Guard workforce is so important. New cutters, aircraft, facilities, and other capabilities are critical, but those investments only deliver results if we have trained and highly motivated, experienced people available to operate them.

Recruitment and retention are inseparable from the investments we make in our Coast Guard families. Every Coast Guard mission starts and ends with people.

I look forward to hearing directly from our witnesses today about what the Coast Guard's personnel are experiencing, where the greatest challenges are, and what Congress can do to address them.

The men and women of the Coast Guard have demonstrated time and time again that they will be there when America needs them. Our responsibility is to make sure America is there for them.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

[Mr. Carbajal's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Salud O. Carbajal of California, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation

Good afternoon, Chair Ezell, and thank you for holding today's hearing.

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I personally visited Coast Guard housing in Santa Barbara twice after learning about serious problems, including mold, persistent water issues, and deteriorating floors. In fact, one Coast Guard member fell through a shower floor because moisture and mold had caused the floor to deteriorate.

No servicemember should have to choose between paying more than they can afford to live near their duty station and living in housing that is unsafe or unhealthy.

And this is not simply a quality-of-life issue.

When Coast Guard members cannot afford to live near their units—or when the housing provided to them is not safe—it can directly affect readiness, morale and the Service's ability to retain the people it needs.

For the families stationed in these communities, the cost of serving can extend well beyond the demands of the job itself. Housing costs can make living near a duty station unrealistic.

Long commutes can take valuable time away from family.

Access to medical care can require significant travel. And, finding affordable childcare can be especially difficult for families whose schedules do not fit the traditional nine-to-five workday.

We need to recognize these challenges for what they are: readiness issues.

When a Coast Guard member is worried about whether their family can make rent, whether their child has access to daycare, or whether their family can see a doctor, that affects morale.

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The men and women of the Coast Guard have demonstrated time and time again that they will be there when America needs them.

Our responsibility is to make sure America is there for them.

Thank you, Chair Ezell. I yield back.

Mr. EZELL. The gentleman yields.

I now recognize the ranking member of the full committee, Mr. Larsen, for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICK LARSEN OF WASHINGTON, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just one more opening statement, then we will get to you.

I want to thank the chair and ranking member for holding today's hearing.

Before we get started, I want to take a moment to honor Lieutenant Connor Overstreet, who lost his life to gun violence, in a very senseless act of gun violence, in my State. And so my heart goes out to his family. This loss hits very close to home as he attended flight school with my son, who is now in the Navy. Lieutenant

Overstreet was a dedicated helicopter pilot who joined the Service to help others, and my condolences go out to his family and friends for their loss.

Joining us today in the audience we have enlisted members of the Coast Guard who have traveled from across the country to be here today. Before the hearing, members of the subcommittee had the opportunity to hear directly from these servicemembers and get their unique perspectives on what it means to be a Coastie. And let me tell you, in the brief time I was there, I can tell you they are all very impressive individuals. We are merely Members of Congress. You actually do some pretty serious work, the four young Coasties that we talked to.

Each of you are vital to today's Coast Guard's success in securing our waters and saving lives, and the country is in your debt.

Hearing directly from enlisted personnel is incredibly helpful as this committee works to improve the Coast Guard and the lives of servicemembers. There are over 30,000 enlisted Coast Guard personnel, and these dedicated individuals play a crucial role in responding to emergencies, enforcing laws, and protecting natural resources.

Coast Guard members serve our country with distinction, and it is our responsibility to ensure they have the resources they need. This includes affordable housing, essential health services, accessible childcare centers, up-to-date cutters, aircraft, and technology.

In fiscal year 2023, the Coast Guard faced a nearly 3,000 personnel shortfall, but in recent years, the Coast Guard has nearly closed that gap.

But it's not enough to recruit new servicemembers, we need to retain them, as well. Once joining the Service, enlisted Coasties continue to face substandard housing options, working conditions, and a lack of available healthcare and affordable childcare.

Due to the unique mission of the Coast Guard, of the Service, the Coast Guard stations are often in remote or high-cost coastal areas. The stress of expensive housing takes a toll on servicemember well-being and overall readiness. Limited Coast Guard housing and the Department of Defense's basic allowance for housing, which is not appropriately considered at Coast Guard locations, forces personnel to find more affordable housing with longer commutes.

On healthcare, the availability of providers accepting TRICARE and the quality of care is inconsistent in many remote areas where the Coast Guard operates. Personnel face unacceptably long wait times for appointments and limited access to specialized care.

A recent New York Times article highlighted the high risk of traumatic brain injuries in boat crews and a history of inaction on this issue by the Coast Guard leadership. That's unacceptable, and Coasties certainly deserve better.

The link between traumatic brain injuries, mental health, and suicide is clear. According to the Coast Guard Foundation, in 2022, Coast Guard members died from suicide twice as often as their peers in other military services. So, investing in mental health is not just a moral obligation, it is critical for maintaining operational readiness.

Recently, Ranking Member Carbajal and I sent a letter to the Coast Guard pushing for an independent review of how to improve monitoring of and preventing traumatic brain injury in boat crews.

Finally, on childcare, many enlisted personnel are parents who juggle demanding work schedules with family responsibilities. Servicemembers often have difficulty finding affordable and reliable childcare, which directly impacts their ability to do their jobs. While funding was provided in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to build four new child development centers in remote areas, the Coast Guard has struggled with staffing. This limits the number of children who can enroll and forces members to look elsewhere for childcare.

In order to do their jobs, the members of the Coast Guard need the right tools. This committee is closely monitoring the Coast Guard's procurement of new assets and systems through last year's reconciliation funding. While the replacement of aging assets is long overdue, the Coast Guard simply doesn't have the shoreside infrastructure required to support these assets.

In its adoption of new technology, the Coast Guard must prioritize servicemembers.

We have a responsibility to ensure that those who dedicate their lives to protecting Americans receive the resources and support they need to both thrive on duty and off duty. I have seen firsthand in my own district the challenges our Coasties are facing, and I am glad we are taking time to discuss it today.

Thank you, and I yield back.

[Mr. Larsen of Washington's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Rick Larsen of Washington, Ranking Member, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Thank you, Chairman Ezell and Ranking Member Carbajal, for holding today's hearing.

Before we get started, I want to take a moment to honor Lieutenant Connor Overstreet who recently lost his life to a senseless act of gun violence in my state.

This loss hits close to home as he attended flight school with my son. Lieutenant Overstreet was a dedicated helicopter pilot who joined the Service to help others. My condolences go out to his family and friends for their loss.

Joining us in the audience, we have enlisted members of the Coast Guard who have traveled from across the country to be here today. Before the hearing, members of this subcommittee had the opportunity to hear directly from these servicemembers and get their unique perspectives on what it means to be a Coastie, and, let me tell you, they're impressive individuals.

Each of you are vital to the Coast Guard's success in securing our waters and saving lives. The country is in your debt.

Hearing directly from enlisted personnel is incredibly helpful as this committee works to improve the Coast Guard and the lives of servicemembers.

There are over 30,000 enlisted Coast Guard personnel. These dedicated individuals play a crucial role in responding to emergencies, enforcing laws, and protecting natural resources.

Coast Guard members serve our country with distinction, and it is our responsibility to ensure they have the resources they need.

This includes affordable housing, essential health services, accessible childcare centers, and up-to-date cutters, aircraft, and technology.

In fiscal year 2023, the Coast Guard faced a nearly 3,000 personnel shortfall but in recent years has nearly closed that gap.

It is not enough, however, to recruit new servicemembers, we need to retain them. Once joining the Service, enlisted Coasties continue to face substandard housing options, working conditions, a lack of available healthcare, and affordable childcare.

Due to the unique mission of the Service, Coast Guard stations are often in remote or high-cost coastal areas.

The stress of expensive housing takes a toll on servicemember well-being and overall readiness.

Limited Coast Guard owned housing and the Department of Defense's Basic Allowance for Housing, which does not appropriately consider Coast Guard locations, forces personnel to find more affordable housing with longer commutes.

The availability of providers accepting TRICARE and the quality of care is inconsistent in many remote areas where the Coast Guard operates. Personnel face unacceptably long wait times for appointments and limited access to specialized care.

Not only does the Coast Guard face unique operating environments, Coasties also face unique health problems associated with service.

A recent New York Times article highlighted the high risk of traumatic brain injuries in boat crew and a history of inaction on the issue by Coast Guard leadership. This is unacceptable, and Coasties deserve better.

The link between traumatic brain injuries, mental health, and suicide is clear.

According to the Coast Guard Foundation, in 2022, Coast Guard members died from suicide twice as often as their peers in other military services. Investing in mental health is not just a moral obligation, it is critical for maintaining operational readiness.

Recently, Ranking Member Carbajal and I sent a letter to the Coast Guard pushing an independent review of how to improve monitoring and preventing of traumatic brain injury in boat crews.

Many enlisted personnel are parents who juggle demanding work schedules with family responsibilities.

Servicemembers often have difficulty finding affordable and reliable childcare which directly impacts their ability to do their jobs.

While funding was provided in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to build four new Child Development Centers in remote areas, the Coast Guard has struggled with staffing.

This limits the number of children who can enroll and forces members to look elsewhere for childcare—something very difficult to find in remote areas.

In order to do their job, members of the Coast Guard need the right tools.

I am closely monitoring the Coast Guard's procurement of new assets and systems through last year's reconciliation funding. While the replacement of aging assets is long overdue, the Coast Guard simply doesn't have the shoreside infrastructure required to support those assets.

In its adoption of new technology, the Coast Guard must prioritize servicemembers.

We have a responsibility to ensure that those who dedicate their lives to protecting Americans receive the resources and support they need to thrive both on and off duty.

I have seen firsthand the challenges our Coasties are facing, and I am glad we are taking the time to discuss it today.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. EZELL. The gentleman yields back.

Briefly, to our witnesses—you already know this, but I have got to do it anyway—I would like to take a moment to explain the lighting system to you. There are three lights in front of you. Green means go, yellow means you're running out of time, and red means put on brakes.

I ask unanimous consent that the witnesses' full statements be included in the record.

Without objection, so ordered.

I ask unanimous consent that the record of today's hearing remain open until such time as our witnesses have provided answers to any questions that may be submitted to them in writing.

Without objection, so ordered.

I also ask unanimous consent that the record remain open for 15 days for any additional comments and information submitted by Members or witnesses to be included in the record of today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

As your written testimony has been made part of the record, the committee asks that you limit your opening remarks to 5 minutes.

With that, Vice Admiral Moore, you are recognized for 5 minutes for your testimony.

TESTIMONY OF VICE ADMIRAL NATHAN A. MOORE, DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR OPERATIONS, U.S. COAST GUARD; AND MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER PHILLIP N. WALDRON, MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE COAST GUARD, U.S. COAST GUARD

TESTIMONY OF VICE ADMIRAL NATHAN A. MOORE, DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR OPERATIONS, U.S. COAST GUARD

Admiral MOORE. Good afternoon, Chairman Ezell, Ranking Member Carbajal, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and for your steadfast support of the United States Coast Guard.

Every day, our Active Duty, Reserve, civilian, and Auxiliary workforce safeguards our Nation's waters, protects our ports, saves those in peril, interdicts illicit activity, supports national defense, and responds when disaster strikes.

As the Deputy Commandant for Operations, I have the privilege of seeing the Coast Guard missions through the lens of the men and women who execute it. Our members serve with professionalism, courage, and adaptability wherever the Nation calls. They are our greatest strength and our decisive advantage.

Service readiness begins with our people. As we modernize our cutters, boats, aircraft, command and control systems, and shore infrastructure to meet growing mission demand and evolving threats, we need to have the trained crews, maintainers, operators, and support personnel necessary to operate and sustain those assets safely and effectively. That is why the Coast Guard must grow by 15,000 members. They will bolster our ranks to join the crews who operate our cutters, aircraft, and boats; the technicians who maintain them; and the medical, training, and mission support professionals who keep our force ready.

To achieve this historic growth, the Coast Guard has exceeded our fiscal year 2025 enlisted accession goals, and we are on track to build on that momentum as fiscal year 2026 concludes. With your support for the fiscal year 2027 budget, we can build the workforce required to meet the Nation's demands.

But adding these people alone does not create operational capacity. We must bring people in the door, but we also must have the training, infrastructure, and support necessary to turn the growth of this workforce into operational readiness.

Our shore infrastructure is essential, and I like to say that every Coast Guard mission starts and ends at a shore facility. These modern barracks, training, industrial support facilities, the resilient waterfronts, the piers, the runways, and the hangars are vital supports for our cutters, boats, and aircraft. These facility investments are particularly important as the new capabilities enter the fleet. A new cutter without a training crew can't get underway. An aircraft without qualified maintainers can't launch. A modern com-

mand and control system without trained operators cannot deliver its intended information and decision advantage.

So it's important to understand that fleet modernization is not complete just when we deliver the asset; not when the cutter, boat, or aircraft is delivered. It's only complete when the Coast Guard can employ that asset effectively in support of the Nation. That requires us to synchronize investments in platforms, people, training, and infrastructure all at once. Together, these synchronized investments to modernize our fleet and support our new assets will allow the Coast Guard to maintain today's operations while building capacity required for tomorrow.

As the Deputy Commandant for Operations, I can tell you that the increased operational demand for our missions worldwide is growing, and the new assets are coming thanks to the funding for our historic recapitalization. But now, we must build the workforce and the infrastructure necessary to put this new capability on mission. With the support of this subcommittee and Congress, we can grow the force, field these new capabilities, and build the operational capacity the Nation needs from its Coast Guard.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to your questions.

[The joint prepared statement of Vice Admiral Moore and Master Chief Petty Officer Waldron is on page 13.]

Mr. EZELL. The gentleman yields back.

Master Chief Waldron, you are recognized for 5 minutes for your testimony.

TESTIMONY OF MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER PHILLIP N. WALDRON, MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE COAST GUARD, U.S. COAST GUARD

Master Chief Petty Officer WALDRON. Good afternoon, Chairman Ezell, Ranking Member Carbajal, Ranking Member Larsen, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and thank you for your continued support of the United States Coast Guard and the men and women who serve our Nation every day.

It's my privilege to represent the Coast Guard's workforce and their families whose sacrifice enables them to serve. In conversations with our crews all over the Service, I hear tremendous pride in what they do, but I also hear clearly what they need from us if we expect them to continue answering the Nation's call.

Recruiting is important, but bringing people into the Service is only half the equation. We have to give them every reason to stay. That means careers filled with quality training, strong leadership, and absolute certainty that their families are stable and supported while they serve.

The Nation asks a great deal of them. A day in the life of a Coastie can change in an instant. They are often called upon with little or no warning to save lives, defend our maritime border and approaches, protect the flow of commerce vital to our economy, respond to a natural disaster, or confront an emerging threat to our national security. Our people are the U.S. Coast Guard.

Now, a little while ago, I was so proud to introduce you to a few of our high-performing enlisted members. Chief Manrow and Petty

Officer Buccieri are carrying out some of our Nation's most demanding missions, from boarding dark fleet tankers to providing security for national events with counter-UAS capabilities. Petty Officer Pedersen is preparing our newest members for the demands of Coast Guard service as an instructor, while Petty Officer Matuska helps keep our aircraft ready to launch when America needs them.

Now, those members represent thousands of Coast Guard men and women doing extraordinary work every day. My responsibility as the Service's senior enlisted advisor is to make sure their voices are heard and to tell you what they need to continue succeeding. As Congress continues investing in Coast Guard platforms, I ask you to make the same commitment to the people who operate them, because until a crew steps aboard, a multimillion-dollar cutter or aircraft is simply dormant steel and aluminum.

First, we need to invest in the development of our workforce. Our crews need the training, tools, facilities, and career growth opportunities necessary to operate increasingly sophisticated assets. As our missions and platforms evolve, our training, technical expertise, and personnel support systems must evolve with them.

Second, we need greater stability and support for our Coast Guard families. Our members will accept hard assignments, they will deploy on short notice, and they will serve in remote locations, because that's what they signed up to do. What should not be a challenge, though, is finding adequate housing, securing childcare, or getting healthcare for their families.

As Ranking Member Carbajal stated—I want to be clear about this—these are not simply quality-of-life issues; these are readiness issues. A member worried about childcare, healthcare, or whether their family is able to afford housing cannot give the mission 100 percent of their focus. These challenges are particularly difficult for members assigned to geographically remote locations where access to essential services may be limited.

We ask our folks to serve wherever the Nation needs them, so we must make it possible for their families to thrive wherever we send them. When we take care of these fundamental needs, our members can focus on standing the watch, responding to emergencies, and protecting the American people.

Finally, we need to make Coast Guard service more sustainable. Our crews adapt to extraordinary operational demands. They prove that daily. But they shouldn't have to compensate for gaps in training, personnel, infrastructure, or family support. When we invest consistently in our workforce, the return is measurable: greater readiness, stronger retention, deeper expertise, more resilient families, and a Coast Guard better prepared to respond whenever and wherever they are needed.

The men and women of the United States Coast Guard will continue to answer the Nation's call. With the continued support of the committee and Congress, we can give them the training, support, and stability they need to continue serving the United States. Our people are ready to do their part. I ask for your support in giving them what they need to do it.

Thank you for the opportunity again to testify, and I look forward to your questions.

[The joint prepared statement of Vice Admiral Moore and Master Chief Petty Officer Waldron follows:]

Joint Prepared Statement of Vice Admiral Nathan A. Moore, Deputy Commandant for Operations, U.S. Coast Guard; and Master Chief Petty Officer Phillip N. Waldron, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard, U.S. Coast Guard

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Ezell, Ranking Member Carbajal, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and for your continued support of the United States Coast Guard men and women who serve our Nation every day.

We are honored to provide this joint testimony on the Coast Guard workforce and the investments required to keep our members always ready. Service readiness begins with the readiness of our people. In an operating environment defined by ever increasing mission demands, evolving threats, and aging assets, our people remain our greatest strength and our decisive advantage.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's continued support for Coast Guard men and women, and their families, and welcome the opportunity to discuss the path ahead.

FORCE GENERATION AND TRAINING

The Coast Guard must grow by 15,000 members to staff, support, operate, and maintain the new assets funded through the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Reconciliation and improve readiness. This growth includes crews for our cutters, aircraft and small boats, medical and childcare providers, and maintenance technicians.

The Coast Guard's recruiting and training enterprises will drive this effort. In Fiscal Year 2025 the Service exceeded its enlisted accession goal by 21 percent and recruited more than 5,200 active-duty members. The Coast Guard is on track to surpass that level in 2026.

The Service must sustain this momentum and convert accessions into lasting growth. We will do so by training the workforce with modern tools, updated curriculum, and improved facilities, supported by investments in Training Centers Cape May and Birmingham-Southern.

Additional investments in accessions, training, and support, as outlined in the FY 2027 President's Budget, remain essential to Service readiness. These investments will help ensure that current and future Coast Guard men and women, and their families, have the support structure necessary to conduct all Coast Guard missions.

FORCE MODERNIZATION AND RESTRUCTURING

Modernization is not only an acquisition priority, but an imperative for workforce evolution and effectiveness. With support from the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Reconciliation, the Coast Guard is undertaking its most significant fleet recapitalization effort in generations. Continued investment in cutters, boats, aircraft, command-and-control systems, and sustainment capabilities remain essential to combating the burden that aging assets present to readiness.

Modernization also requires organizational changes. As the Coast Guard aligns people, processes, and platforms to meet current and future requirements, the Service is overhauling its force structure and training pipelines to better connect our workforce capacity and mission demand to operational success. The Coast Guard is also developing specialized career paths, optimizing mission support functions, and surging resources to unit commanders to ensure they have the personnel and equipment needed to execute their missions safely and effectively.

WORKFORCE HEALTH AND SAFETY

A healthy workforce is a ready workforce. The Coast Guard is strengthening education, prevention, reporting mechanisms, response capabilities, and accountability to combat sexual assault and the criminal behaviors that enable it, including sexual harassment. Our people must trust that the Service will address misconduct, support victims, and hold leaders responsible for maintaining climates in which every member can serve safely and with dignity.

Healthcare access remains a significant concern for many Coast Guard families, particularly those stationed in geographically remote communities. Timely access to

primary care, specialty care, behavioral health services, and family support resources directly affects Service readiness and retention. The Coast Guard is increasing behavioral health capacity, improving access pathways, and leveraging telehealth and other remote tools to better support our members and families wherever they serve.

Reliable and affordable childcare enables members to report for duty, accept assignments, stand watch, deploy, and remain focused on mission execution. Similarly, members should not have to choose between serving at a critical unit and finding safe, affordable housing within a reasonable commute. Continued support for childcare subsidies, partnerships, and capacity expansion remains essential to reducing stress on Coast Guard families and improving retention.

Across the Service, Coast Guard members continue to face significant infrastructure challenges driven by aging facilities, deferred maintenance, mission growth, and the impacts of natural disasters. These conditions affect the daily lives of our workforce. Improved barracks, reliable utilities, effective industrial support facilities, and resilient waterfront infrastructure are basic requirements for mission execution and workforce stability.

OPERATIONS

Workforce readiness comes to life at the unit level, where Coast Guard men and women stand the watch, answer distress calls, interdict illicit activity, protect our ports and waterways, enforce the law, support national defense, and respond to disasters. A day in the life of our members is defined by service and adaptability. It also depends on the readiness of the systems, facilities, and the support structures behind them.

Coast Guard men and women continue to answer the Nation's call. However, sustained and increasing operational demand without commensurate investments in workforce readiness increases risk. We must protect readiness deliberately and consistently. Sacrificing in this regard is not acceptable.

CONCLUSION

The men and women of the United States Coast Guard serve because they want to make a difference for the Nation. They stand the watch in demanding conditions, in small communities, major ports, and in joint force environments. They are America's greatest strength.

To stay always ready, we must continue to generate and train the crew, modernize and restructure for the future, protect workforce health and safety, invest in our shore infrastructure, and sustain front-line operations with the resources and support this workforce deserves.

The Fiscal Year 2027 President's Budget provides the critical investments needed to restore and strengthen Service readiness, begin the required personnel growth, and build the capacity required to reach and sustain an expansion of 15,000 members. The Budget invests across the full readiness chain by funding operational asset recapitalization, modernizing critical shore and training infrastructure, expanding behavioral health staffing and sexual assault prevention and response programs, and strengthening vital family support initiatives such as childcare and housing assistance. Together with continued support and increased funding, these investments will ensure the Coast Guard has the personnel, platforms, and facilities needed to meet current operational demands and secure readiness for the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your continued support of the United States Coast Guard. We look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you.

I am going to now recognize Mr. Van Drew. I know you have got somewhere you need to go, so go ahead.

Dr. VAN DREW. I thank the chairman. I have a bill on the floor. I have to manage the floor, so thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for being here. I am going to go a little different tack, a little different direction. The Coast Guard is an integral part of my district, as you all know. You have heard me speak about it over and over again, and I am proud too and proud of you all in southern New Jersey, and as you know, we are a Coast Guard community.

If we really want to help our Coasties, one of the ways we need to do it is, again, as it always is, not just with words, but with actions. I recently had the privilege of going out with some folks out in the water in the Barnegat Inlet in New Jersey, which is in the Ocean County area, to inspect aids to navigation, ATON, firsthand that you are familiar with. And what I found really surprised and shocked me, to be honest with you, and I think it does a lot of people.

These critical assets were barely visible in some cases, they were misplaced in some cases, and in a condition that could easily send an inexperienced boater into shallow water or into a dangerous situation. This is not a cosmetic issue, let me be clear. They don't have to look beautiful, but they have to be visible, they have to function. They obviously save both people and boats.

It's a basic maritime safety infrastructure that the problem is bigger than just the inlet in New Jersey. The Coast Guard maintains about 50,000, evidently, of these aids nationwide. DHS supported that the 3-year average availability rate for short-range Federal aids to navigation is well below where it needs to be. This has been delayed maintenance, delayed repair, and delayed recapitalization, particularly for major fixed aids. And, of course, this puts stress on the Coast Guard, on the Coasties themselves.

The vessels doing this work are aging, too. The Coast Guard's buoy tenders average about—everybody ready for this—59 years old, basically 60 years old. And I don't put these downfalls on you. I don't put it on the men and women of the Coast Guard. The Coasties doing this work are being asked to maintain an enormous network while carrying out research, and search and rescue, law enforcement, security, and the Service's other essential missions that we are all familiar with.

That is why I am working closely with the Coast Guard on legislation to provide additional resources to maintain and modernize these markers. It's not that complicated. They have to be visible, they have to be clear, they have to be in the proper position. And we have to make sure missing or displaced aids are quickly corrected. This is important. This is a main function.

I am looking forward to working closely with the committee on this as well under the leadership of Chairman Ezell.

Vice Admiral Moore and Master Chief Waldron, thank you both. I enjoy you both being here.

Master Chief Waldron, what does a normal day look like for an Aids to Navigation Team? How do they inspect, how do they repair, how do they replace, how do they reposition these markers? And what happens from the moment a damaged or missing aid is reported until it's corrected?

And again—and I know you would agree with me—this is really important stuff. People can get hurt out there. And there are, as you know, cases all the time of getting grounded, of just putting, again, their lives in danger, the people's lives who were navigating, and of course, the ship itself.

So with that, if you could give us just a little view of what it's like.

Master Chief Petty Officer WALDRON. Yes, sir. I would be glad to, because aids to navigation is one of those missions that I hold

near and dear to my own heart, having been a buoy tender sailor myself.

So, average day at an Aids to Navigation Team consists of three primary functions: training, maintaining, and operating, just as it is across our entire boat forces community. But specific to aids to navigation, the training part of it is of paramount importance, because they have to be proficient in going out and doing the job, and it looks a little bit different for your Aids to Navigation Teams, because not only do they have to learn how to be professional mariners, they also have to learn how to work a buoy deck, because, frankly, it's very dangerous work.

When we talk about maintaining, we maintain our own boats, and they require a significant amount of maintenance to keep them in the condition we need for them to go out and do the job.

And then when it comes to operating, all of our aids to navigation are on a cycle of maintenance where they are routinely serviced by both our Aids to Navigation Teams as well as our buoy tenders.

And so to the question of, well, what do we do whenever we get the call that an aid may be off station, may be missing, may be unserviceable due to a light that is extinguished, when that call comes in, it normally goes to a command center and the command center will relay it to the cognizant Aids to Navigation Team or buoy tender. And from that point there, we use a flowchart to determine how severe the outage may be as related to the safety of the maritime community. And so they will factor in how quickly do we need to get this one fixed and then formulate a response plan. It's generally going to be pretty quick turnaround, to the greatest extent that we can.

But that's kind of an overall view of——

Dr. VAN DREW [interrupting]. I thank you for your answer, and we have run out of time. I am going to submit some more questions for the record. Please pay attention to Barnegat. Folks should take a look out there. It needs some help, but in general, this is an important area.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you so much for your latitude on this, and I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. EZELL. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Mr. Carbajal for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As rank has its privileges, I will defer to Ranking Member Larsen to go first.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Ranking Member.

Master Chief, what is the Coast Guard doing now to address affordability issues for Coast Guard members, especially those assigned to high-cost or to remote areas?

Master Chief Petty Officer WALDRON. Ranking Member, to make sure that I understand the question expressly, when we say the affordability, is this relating to housing primarily, sir?

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Yes, yes. Mainly housing, but I am thinking about childcare, as well. I brought up childcare in my opening comments.

Master Chief Petty Officer WALDRON. Thank you, Ranking Member.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Yes.

Master Chief Petty Officer WALDRON. So, on the topic of housing, housing is a topic that we are inextricably tied to our other services in the Department of War. However, I would offer that, for the Coast Guard, it usually looks a little bit different. We don't tend to have the major bases where an ample amount of housing is present on the base. Our folks tend to be stationed in remote locations, as you know well in your district with the surf stations.

Where it looks a little bit different is that we are more heavily contingent on utilizing BAH to house our members. And what are we doing to address that? We recognize that oftentimes we station our folks in very high-cost areas where BAH doesn't meet that need. And so we are working with the other services as well as having representation on the President's Military Spouse Commission to really bring these issues to light and to really formulate a good way forward.

I am exceptionally proud that on the President's spouses commission, for example, Admiral Lunday's wife and my wife are both members of that, and they can present how it looks different for our service as compared to the others.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Are you contemplating something like a BAH bonus for Coasties or anything, sort of, to break this link, this hard link between what DoD pays, like, my son in San Diego versus what someone might get, say, in Sitka?

Master Chief Petty Officer WALDRON. Ranking Member, I am unfamiliar if anyone has presented a plan for a bonus. I know that BAH obviously is going to be a topic that's governed by law, and so I would have to defer that to an entity that could speak more on what we can do within the legal construct.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Sure. Admiral Moore, the Coast Guard awarded a $173 million contract for improvements in Base Seattle for the home port of future Polar Security Cutters. Very happy about that. But, obviously, this construction, it's going to be a while. What infrastructure work still needs to be done to ensure that the base is ready for the future?

Admiral MOORE. Ranking Member Larsen, thank you for the question, sir.

As you pointed out, they awarded that contract very recently, just this week. It was well received. We are happy to see that. We have stepped into Seattle in phases, so we are up to the phase at this point, phase 3, where the award will give us the actual final piers and pier space and some of the secondary buildings ashore to support it.

We have been able to secure short-term leases in and around the facility, especially on the north side there of the opening. So we have been able to temporarily homeport cutters there and visiting cutters. So, we fully intend to be able to manage the icebreakers that we have today, *Healy* and *Storis* in port, *Polar Star*. And then as the new PSCs come online, we will have that home port ready to receive them when they arrive.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Kind of related to that, though, is the reconciliation bill provided the Coast Guard with nearly $25

billion primarily for cutters and aircraft as platforms. Didn't really contemplate the future of funding for long-term maintenance or crew costs to continue to operate those assets. So what is the Coast Guard's plan if future appropriations don't address that funding need?

Admiral MOORE. Yes, thank you, sir, for the question. As the Deputy Commandant for Operations, I can just tell you that I am 100 percent convinced that our future readiness is based on our ability to support, maintain, and provide that specific maintenance operation of the cutters and aircraft that are coming. I mean, we think a lot about things that have the shiny stripes on them and float and fly, but I know that maintenance is directly tied to operations. It's not something that's a secondary note or somehow less important.

So, we have been very fortunate and thankful for the funding through the reconciliation act for the new assets. Now, the infrastructure that comes to support them is our next highest priority. We have to maintain the assets themselves, train the crews to operate them. As we move forward into the fiscal year 2027 budget and beyond, the Coast Guard will need support to continue to grow our operations and maintenance funds to support these new assets.

And from my perspective, again, on the operations side, the worst thing we could do is deliver these new ships and have them tied up to the pier because they are broken, or have these new aircraft sit on the tarmac because we don't have spare parts for them. So, that maintenance funding is the top priority of us operationally moving forward.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. EZELL. The gentleman yields.

Admiral Moore, in your testimony, you make the case for growing the Coast Guard by 15,000 members, in part, to man new cutters, aircraft, and small boats. Regrettably, the Service's budget request does not support a growth in surface or air assets, let alone the money to maintain what you already have. Can you explain where you anticipate the new assets, where they will come from, to support growing the Service's military force by more than 30 percent?

Admiral MOORE. Mr. Chairman, thank you for the question.

The 15,000 growth that I mentioned, that is primarily to man and operate and support the new assets that are coming, the assets that are coming through the fiscal year 2025 reconciliation bill. So as we work the numbers and look at both the operations, the sustainment, the training system that will get us there, that's where those people will go.

We are starting to see, through recruiting and training successes for us in recent years, an influx in people already. We are already starting to see that growth, and that additional capacity for training and the additional capacity to operate these new assets, the icebreakers, the new aircraft that are coming, that is where those 15,000 people, that's where that number comes from, sir.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you.

The Coast Guard often says its greatest assets are its people. The Service is not always treating its people as valuable assets. For example, rescue swimmers, who jump from helicopters into

stormy seas to perform daring rescues, are now training in a community recreational swimming pool because their own training pool suffered a catastrophic failure. Likewise, the Coasties are doing more maintenance work on small boats in the stifling heat in Virginia without any shade. The Service would never hire a contractor who provided such inadequate working conditions. What are the Coast Guard's plans to replace these facilities?

Admiral MOORE. Thank you for the question, Chairman. You are completely accurate in your assessment. That's exactly right. We owe our members the best training facilities. And that pool, the aquatic facility that you reference in Petaluma, we are looking at what a full-time answer would be there, what the permanent position would be for us for an aquatic facility to meet that need.

That is some of the highest end training that we have. Those members that we put out in helicopters that lower down and actually rescue people out of the water, you can imagine, that is some of the most difficult and arduous training that we have, and they deserve the best facility. And so a full-time answer for the training facility for that aviation survival swimming school, that is absolutely a priority for us.

Likewise, on the engineering side for the maintenance there in Yorktown—I am a lifelong naval engineer. I used to do that stuff for a living in the Coast Guard, fixing boats and aircraft. That's what I grew up doing. And I can tell you, doing it outside in the elements is definitely suboptimal——

Mr. EZELL [interposing]. Yes.

Admiral MOORE [continuing]. To put it nicely. It's hot or it's cold or it's raining or it's both, and I would tell you that, especially today's modern assets with the complicated mechanical and electrical systems, you need to have some environmental control while you are doing that detailed maintenance. So creating a covered facility or a better approach to how we do that maintenance is absolutely optimal in Yorktown.

So both of these projects, both of the things you mentioned, are things that we are prioritizing in future requests for infrastructure projects, and we will look for your support in those future appropriations.

Mr. EZELL. You have my support.

You placed a high emphasis on quality of life issues, Chief. However, we know that there are some areas where the Coast Guard has historically struggled to perform well, even in the DC area where the Coast Guard senior leadership is headquartered.

How do quality of life issues play a pivotal role in recruiting and retention, and what resources does the Coast Guard need to improve on in these areas?

Master Chief Petty Officer WALDRON. Mr. Chairman, a little bit ago, I had mentioned how it's not only about recruiting, it's about retaining. We have had a mentality for a long time in the Coast Guard that we often will recruit individuals, but we retain families. And to your point, I don't think that we could overstate how important it is that we do provide the most adequate housing, the most adequate childcare or means for folks to take care of their children in the absence of a child development center, as well as healthcare. And, quite frankly, sir, we struggle with all three of these at times

because they often are indicative of larger problems than just what is limited to the Coast Guard.

But to your point, I absolutely agree with you, sir, these are things that we must continue to work on through the support of this committee, as well as every other means available, be it partnering with our DOW counterparts or working through the executive branch with the Presidential spouses commission.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you. Help me to help you, because we want to make sure you succeed, and we get the best of the best that stays with us.

I now recognize Mr. Carbajal for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Master Chief Waldron, I'm thankful for the Coast Guard, that the Coast Guard has worked with me to secure funding to improve family housing for servicemembers in Santa Barbara, California. This 58-year-old housing facility will be undergoing much needed exterior improvements, utility upgrades, and drainage. But, of course, much more is needed.

Despite this effort, the Central Coast faces a mounting backlog of unfunded housing priorities that negatively impact the lives of servicemembers and the ability to recruit and retain members. How is the Coast Guard working to make safe and affordable housing more accessible, and how can Congress help?

Master Chief Petty Officer WALDRON. Ranking Member, as we discussed a little bit ago, the housing quandary is one where we must address it twofold. We must address improvements to Government-owned housing. Specifically, as you mentioned with Santa Barbara housing, I think that's an area that absolutely highlights both the need and, fortunately, in the recent past, some of the efforts that we have been making to get ahead of that.

And then the other half of the equation is obviously with BAH. I think that all of us in this room here can recognize that we tend to station coastguardsmen in very expensive areas. Sometimes they are very, very remote areas; oftentimes they are in resort communities where BAH doesn't account for the need. And, frankly, a lot of the problem is that the tables have turned as time has gone by. A lot of rental units that we would normally have had Coasties seeking previously have been turned into short-term rentals and have become far too expensive for our folks to stay in long term.

As far as what could we ask from you all, it would be the continued support of this committee as we look at how can we get BAH on par with what the demands are for the areas that we are stationing people.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

Vice Admiral Moore, recent reporting has shed light on the traumatic brain injury risks that servicemembers are exposed to. Although I support the creation of a new Brain Health Initiative and believe it would be a useful resource to prevent, diagnose, and treat brain injuries, I am also concerned with the Coast Guard's lack of transparency.

What tangible actions is the Coast Guard taking to protect servicemembers, and what are you doing to ensure that you are addressing the issue in a compressive manner?

Admiral MOORE. Thank you, Ranking Member, for the question.

First of all, nothing is more important than the safety of our crews. And you can look at the four people sitting behind me here that you had lunch with, and their safety when they go out on mission is paramount to all of us in the Coast Guard, all of the senior leadership. And that is why we launched the Brain Health Initiative, to get after it. It's a comprehensive program. I can walk through a few of the actions for you here this afternoon.

First of all, the first thing we did is we have established immediate treatment and training requirements for our medical providers. Those are our flight surgeons at the air stations, the doctors at the clinics on the bases, the corpsmen that are actually out on the cutters with our members. We have established those immediate training requirements for them in terms of treatment of potential brain health injuries.

We have sent medical staff to places like the NATO summit in Oslo, which is ongoing right now. We are joining that NATO study for brain health in boats. That is part of a 15-nation effort in NATO, and we are part of that. We have directed our commands to be trained in concussion protocols, and you have to be able to notice and identify these issues at the point of impact, like where they actually happen. First, that is our local commands, and we need our commanders to be trained in how to do that.

One of the things we are going to do is establish a baseline for every member in the Coast Guard. It's the same as what you see that they do with NFL players. You have to know where a person starts in terms of a baseline of activity and then that tells you, as you see things change, potential injuries or changes in patterns that will provide you an indication of a potential brain injury.

So those are a couple of the initial steps. There is much, much more to it, of course, lots more work for us to do. We can provide a full briefing on our Brain Health Initiative, sir, and I can bring the actual medical professionals over to explain it in much more detail to you.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

Admiral Moore, this is a softball, so this should be very easy to answer. We keep talking about the issues like housing, healthcare, and childcare. What is the relationship between these issues and readiness?

Admiral MOORE. Thank you, Ranking Member Carbajal. That is a softball, and I appreciate you asking me.

I have the unique—this is interesting. I have the unique sort of situation where I have been an operational commander at multiple levels in the Coast Guard, including the Deputy Commander for Operations, Deputy Commandant. I have also been an engineer. I was a naval engineer doing mission support. I have worked in the personnel office twice over my career. So I have been able to do mission support and operations on both sides of the coin there, and I can tell you that there really isn't any difference.

There is no distinction, in my mind, between someone in the Coast Guard who is supporting operations and someone who is actually operating, because that's all linked to readiness. And as we have described today, if your family doesn't have proper housing, if you don't have available healthcare and childcare, you can't perform on mission. If we don't have the engineers and the logisticians

with spare parts or with the supplies ready, the ship can't get underway and execute its mission.

So, sometimes I get put in a position where people are asking me something about operations as if it's different than all of the logistics and the support that come behind it. And, again, I sort of reject that distinction having worked in both worlds. It's not separate.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Admiral.

I am out of time, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Mr. EZELL. The gentleman yields.

Mr. Patronis, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PATRONIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

If you all wouldn't mind just humoring me for a minute for the other members of the committee, by show of hands, would you please raise your hand if you have ties to the State of Florida?

[Show of hands.]

Mr. EZELL. I don't know if we're out of order here, okay.

Mr. PATRONIS [laughing]. I'm sitting here looking at my notes, and I'm thinking, hell, the master chiefs are Plant City.

So, anyway, thank you all so much for your commitment to our country and service. I think you see how important it is to continue to refresh your statement of service back to the members of this process. This process doesn't have term limits, but there is a lot of turnover. And for us to have the understanding of how important the mission is and also to be able to meet the needs that you've got, you have got to constantly come up here and always show and tell and explain and endure our questions. So, again, thank you for indulging us with all this.

Admiral, what's a big deal to me, as I can kind of get back to what I was asking with the show of hands, in the State of Florida, we have tried to do as much as possible, especially for spouses that are not Coasties or in the Service, is license reciprocity and helping those spouses be able to find employment, especially if they have got licensure issues maybe from another State.

Are we doing enough? What else can we do? What else can we advocate for, and what are you all doing in order to help facilitate greater stability when we need a two-income household?

Admiral MOORE. Yes, thank you, Congressman, for the question.

Certainly, that is an issue. When we look at exit surveys, when we look at reasons people cite for staying in or getting out of the Coast Guard, spouse employment, spousal employment is often a major factor. I mean, it is one of those things. We often see people give us feedback in terms of location and having to move all the time, but spousal employment comes right in kind of as a second ranked issue.

So as we are, of course, fully supportive in the effort to get reciprocity for spouses in any of those careers, that is something that we have leaned into heavily. Master Chief mentioned the spouses committee, and maybe I will let the master chief take a little bit of this answer as well, but you have clearly identified something that is important for us and for the retention of our members.

Mr. PATRONIS. Well, and just a little followup. Years ago in Florida, we passed a bill, we called it the GI bill. And we tried to steal every good idea from every State, including Mississippi, where they

were doing things that made their State more servicemember, service family friendly.

So, again, I'm not an expert, but I am definitely willing to be able to want to lend my advocacy to whatever helps especially make for a happy household.

Master Chief?

Master Chief Petty Officer WALDRON. Sir, I appreciate it. If you wouldn't mind, I would like to just tell a story to highlight the importance of that.

So, my wife and I have been married for about 22 years, and when we first got married, we transferred immediately thereafter. And when I married her, she was a critical care paramedic in the State of Michigan, and we transferred to New Jersey. And within about 3 days, feeling very deflated, she found out that her license did not transfer, and that for the entirety of that tour that we were in New Jersey, she was unable to work in a field that she had already been in for almost a decade. She was fortunately able to attain certification as a basic EMT again, but having been at a much higher level, I can understand expressly how that was quite a blow to her own career.

And so to your point, sir, couldn't agree with you more. This is something that, if we want folks to stay in the Service, we have got to make it easier for them. To me, these are those issues that make a life of service much easier.

Mr. PATRONIS. Well, wherever we can preempt those concerns, we should.

Years ago, I was meeting with a bunch of insurance agents, and one of the insurance agents there brought to light that he was an Air Force dentist, retired from the Air Force as a dentist, moved to the State of Florida, finished his tour of duty there, couldn't practice in the State of Florida, even though he served our airmen all over the world. And what an insult and a slap in the face of somebody who has served who has got a skill set that he now is selling insurance.

So, I appreciate your testimony on that because that's exactly those types of understanding of what give us the ability to go fight and, unfortunately, roll some of the bureaucracy that becomes kind of a territorial dispute. Anyway, thank you all.

And, Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Mr. EZELL. The gentleman yields.

The Chair now recognizes Mr. Crawford, vice chairman of the entire committee.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

Admiral, I want to talk to you a little bit about the Coast Guard's EOD capability, or, actually, the Coast Guard's lack of EOD capability. And we have a report here that was included in the NDAA several years ago. It took over a year beyond the due date to actually get the report completed. And I particularly want to draw attention to section 11260 of it that basically directed the Coast Guard to provide the T&I Committee with a report on its EOD capability.

And I think there was some—because it was tardy, to say the least, I think the report makes it clear that the Coast Guard did not conduct the full analysis that we asked for.

Is it correct that the Coast Guard has no statutory requirement for an EOD capability?

Admiral MOORE. Thank you, Congressman, for the question.

I am familiar with the issue, the report that you describe. We did study the need, potential need for the Coast Guard for an EOD capability and determined that it wasn't necessary.

What we see when we did that analysis is, we are able to get those specific services from Department of War or other partner agencies, law enforcement agencies that have that capability. It's part of—the EOD functions are very specific, right, but it's part of a larger system of port security, counterterrorism that we are responsible for in the ports and waterways, including on the river, on the Mississippi River.

So, if you look at a captain of the port in any of those major ports, they have broad authority to enforce safety and make it happen within their port zone. And what that looks like is things like reaching out to stakeholders in Area Maritime Security Committees. They have high-end capability they can get within the Coast Guard organically. We have our high end——

Mr. CRAWFORD [interrupting]. Admiral, with respect, you're going down a rabbit hole that I really didn't want to go down. What I really wanted to know is simply yes or no, do you have statutory requirement for an EOD capability?

Admiral MOORE. No, sir, we do not.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Okay. So, in effect, you are reliant on the Navy to address your EOD needs or possibly even a municipal public safety bomb squad or some other U.S. Government law enforcement agency. Is that not correct?

Admiral MOORE. Yes, sir. We are able to identify that need through our own—and we have K–9 units. We have counterterrorism forces, assault forces.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Okay.

Admiral MOORE. But for specific EOD, we rely on DOW and other agencies for that.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Okay. What happens if the Navy is occupied in, say, for example, global war on terror or, say, for example, they are engaged with a near-peer adversary, a great power adversary in the Pacific and that leaves you essentially with no EOD capability? The threat doesn't go away because our naval forces are forward deployed and no longer able to respond to you.

So, I think the question that we asked and why we commissioned the report, the questions weren't answered properly. The question is—in the report, on page 4, the Coast Guard stated—and this is a very short report too, and considering you had a couple of years to get it done, I would have expected more. But in the report on page 4, the Coast Guard stated it was "redundant and unnecessary" due to the current protocol to call in the Navy.

I'm just going to tell you, the Navy may not always be there. And if the answer to the question is you don't have the statutory authority, then maybe it's our responsibility to give you the statutory authority so that you can develop your own EOD capability. And

I would recommend considering that, because the current state of play that exists as it does today, not only a continuation of certainly the threat of terrorism that is pervasive, but also engagements with great power adversaries, not only overseas, but that are present here in the counterintelligence space. And your capabilities could then be compromised because of a reliance on a force that might not be there to answer the call if and when that happens.

So, I want you to revisit this report and take a different perspective on it, because we could—I think I could probably build consensus among members on this committee to say we probably do need to invest the statutory authority in the Coast Guard to be able to address specific needs, as it applies to explosive threats, that you are in the position to address without relying on the Navy, because there is—even if they are not deployed, there is still a time lag.

It still takes time to identify, for example, a hazardous device or a piece of ordnance or whatever that poses a threat. And then, what's the response time? And it could mean the difference between life and death. Whereas, if you had your own capability, you would be in a position to mitigate that and retain that left-of-boom posture. That's what this is all about.

My effort here is not to try to create an adversarial relationship. It's quite the opposite. What I want to see is to vest that authority in the Coast Guard and say, we think there actually is a need for EOD capability in your Service—I think it's that important—and that we need to commit to that so that the Coast Guard can be adequately equipped to address any kind of a potential explosive threat that not only protects your troops, but also the community that you serve.

And with that, I have run out of time, so I will yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. EZELL. The gentleman yields back.

If there are no further questions by any of the Members, the subcommittee—not recognized? Anybody?

All right. Seeing none, that concludes the hearing for today. I would like to thank each and every one of you today. I enjoyed the lunch and the time together.

And this subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:04 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

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