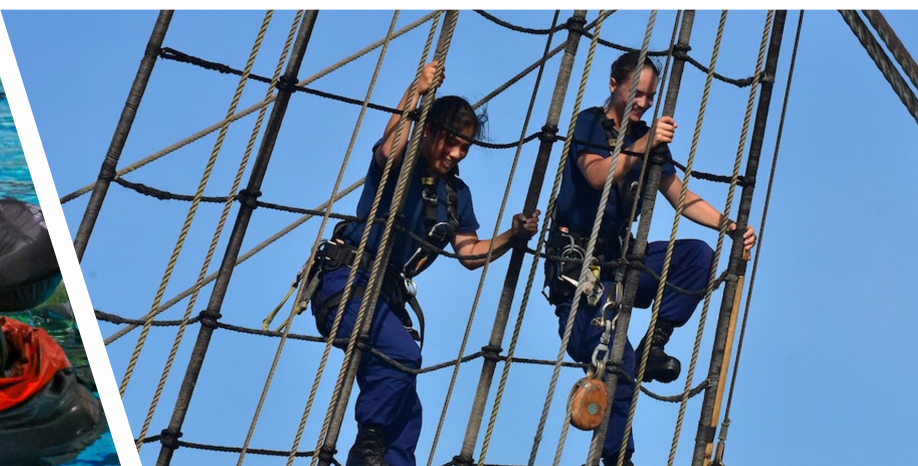


# DACOWITS



Defense Advisory Committee  
on Women in the Services

## 2023 Executive Summary



## Cover photos

### First row, left

A Civil Affairs candidate from the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, low crawls under barbed wire on a Leader Reaction Course as part of a Civil Affairs Assessment and Selection course at Camp Mackall, North Carolina February 5, 2023. The course assessed candidates for trainability and suitability to attend the Civil Affairs Team Leader or the Civil Affairs Noncommissioned Officer pathway and allowed the Civil Affairs Proponent to select candidates for attributes and competencies required to be a member of a Civil Affairs Team. (U.S. Army photo by K. Kassens)

### First row, right

Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Theresa Scheff stands watch on the forecastle aboard the guided missile destroyer USS Dewey during an underway replenishment with the fleet replenishment oiler USNS Big Horn while operating in the South China Sea, Oct. 23, 2023. (Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Gregory Johnson)

### Second row, left

Marines fold the U.S. flag during the 81st annual Evening Colors ceremony at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., Sept. 20, 2023. The ceremony is held to recognize the base's history and legacy. President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated the installation on Sept. 25, 1942, in honor of World War I Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Joseph H. Pendleton, who had long advocated for the establishment of a West Coast training base. (Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Lance Corporal Mary Jenni)

### Second row, right

Schriever Space Force Base, Colo. -- Charles Beames, Forbes Magazine Contributor, interviews service members of the 2nd Space Operations Squadron during his visit to Schriever SFB, CO 7 Sep 23. The purpose of the visit was to learn about 2 SOPS mission and the significance of the of the global positioning satellite system. The squadron performs the command and control mission for the Global Positioning System satellite constellation. (U.S. Space Force Photo by Tiana Williams)

### Third row, left

Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jasmine Schaffer and Master Sgt. Kenneth Kirchoff assist pilots with deploying a life raft during survival, evasion, resistance and escape training in St. Clair Shores, Mich., Oct. 15, 2023.

### Third row, right

Coast Guard Academy cadets climb the rig aboard the Coast Guard cutter Eagle during training in the Atlantic Ocean, July 27, 2023. (Photo by U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officer John Masson)

*The estimated cost of this report or study for the Department of Defense is approximately \$1,128,000 in Fiscal Years 2023–2024. This includes \$485,000 in expenses and \$643,000 in DoD labor.*



# List of DACOWITS Members

Ms. Shelly O'Neill Stoneman (Chair)  
Vice Admiral Robin R. Braun, USN, Retired (Vice Chair)  
Colonel Nancy P. Anderson, USMC, Retired  
Captain Kenneth J. Barrett, USN, Retired  
Dr. (Captain) Catherine W. Cox, USNR, Retired  
Dr. Trudi C. Ferguson  
Sergeant Major Robin C. Fortner, USMC, Retired (departed December 2022)  
Colonel Many-Bears Grinder, AGR, Retired (departed August 2023)  
Command Master Chief Octavia D. Harris, USN, Retired  
Ms. Robin S. Kelleher  
Ms. Marquette J. Leveque, USN Veteran  
Lieutenant General Kevin W. Mangum, USA, Retired  
Sergeant Major Caprecia A. Miller, USA, Retired (departed March 2023)  
Ms. Ann M. Norris (departed March 2023)  
Rear Admiral Mary P. O'Donnell, USCGR, Retired (departed March 2023)  
Brigadier General Jarrisse J. Sanborn, USAF, Retired  
Honorable (Colonel) Dawn E.B. Scholz, USAF, Retired  
Brigadier General Allyson R. Solomon, ANG, Retired  
Dr. (Colonel) Samantha A. Weeks, USAF, Retired

## Report Contributors

### DACOWITS Staff

Colonel Seana M. Jardin, USA, Military Director and Designated Federal Officer (departed June 2023)  
Lieutenant Colonel Samantha J. Frazier, USA, Military Director and Designated Federal Officer  
Ms. Jessica C. Myers, Program Support Strategic Advisor  
Mr. Robert D. Bowling II, Operations Officer  
Master Sergeant Kristen M. Pitlock, USAF, Superintendent (departed July 2023)  
Master Sergeant Courtney N. Reid, USAF, Superintendent

### Westat Insight

Dr. Sidra J. Montgomery  
Mr. Jordan W. Stangle  
Ms. Sade N. Akinbayo  
Ms. Grace E. Seamon-Lahiff

# DACOWITS Charter

**Committee's Official Designation:** The committee will be known as the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS).

**Authority:** The Secretary of Defense, in accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) (5 U.S.C., Appendix) and 41 C.F.R. § 102-3.50(d), established this discretionary advisory committee.

**Objectives and Scope of Activities:** The DACOWITS provides advice and recommendations on matters relating to women in the Armed Forces of the United States, as set out in paragraph four below.

**Description of Duties:** The DACOWITS shall provide independent advice and recommendations on matters and policies relating to recruitment, retention, employment, integration, well-being, and treatment of servicewomen in the Armed Forces of the United States. All DACOWITS work, including subcommittee work, will be in response to written terms of reference (ToR) or taskings approved by the Secretary of Defense or the Deputy Secretary of Defense ("the DoD Appointing Authority"), or the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD(P&R)) unless otherwise provided by statute or Presidential directive.

**Agency or Official to Whom the Committee Reports:** The DACOWITS reports to the Secretary of Defense and the Deputy Secretary of Defense, through the USD(P&R), who may act upon the DACOWITS' advice and recommendations in accordance with Department of Defense (DoD) policy and procedures.

**Support:** The DoD, through the Office of the USD(P&R), provides support for the DACOWITS' functions and ensures compliance with requirements of the FACA, the Government in the Sunshine Act ('the Sunshine Act') (5 U.S.C. § 552b), governing Federal statutes and regulations, and DoD policy and procedures.

**Estimated Annual Operating Costs and Staff Years:** The estimated annual operating cost for the DACOWITS, to include travel, meetings, and contract support, is approximately \$1,200,000. The estimated annual personnel cost to the DoD is 4.0 full-time equivalents.

**Designated Federal Officer:** The DACOWITS' Designated Federal Officer (DFO) shall be a full-time or permanent part-time DoD Federal civilian officer or employee, or active duty member of the Armed Forces, designated in accordance with DoD policy and procedures.

The DACOWITS' DFO is required to attend all DACOWITS and subcommittee meetings for the entirety of each meeting. However, in the absence of the DACOWITS DFO, a properly approved Alternate DFO, duly designated to the DACOWITS in accordance with DoD policy and procedures, shall attend the entire duration of all DACOWITS and subcommittee meetings.

The DFO, or the Alternate DFO, calls all DACOWITS and subcommittee meetings; prepares and approves all meeting agendas; and adjourns any meeting when the DFO, or the Alternate DFO, determines adjournment to be in the public interest or required by governing regulations or DoD policy and procedures.

**Estimated Number and Frequency of Meetings:** The DACOWITS shall meet at the call of the DACOWITS' DFO, in consultation with the DACOWITS' Chair and the USD(P&R). The estimated number of meetings is four per year.

**Duration:** The need for this advisory function is on a continuing basis; however, it is subject to renewal every two years.

**Termination:** The DACOWITS shall terminate upon completion of its mission or two years from the date this charter is filed, whichever is sooner, unless the DoD renews the DACOWITS in accordance with DoD policy and procedures.

**Membership and Designation:** The DACOWITS shall be composed of no more than 20 members who have prior experience in the military or with women-related workforce issues. Members will include leaders with diverse and inclusive backgrounds, experience, and thought relating to the recruitment and retention, the employment and integration, and the well-being and treatment of women. These members will come from varied backgrounds including academia, industry, private and public sectors, and other professions.

The appointment of DACOWITS members shall be approved by the DoD Appointing Authority for a term of service of one-to-four years, with annual renewals, in accordance with DoD policy and procedures. No member, unless approved by the DoD Appointing Authority, may serve more than two consecutive terms of service on the DACOWITS, to include its subcommittees, or serve on more than two DoD federal advisory committees at one time. DACOWITS members who are not full-time or permanent part-time Federal civilian officers or employees, or active duty members of the Uniformed Services, shall be appointed as experts or consultants pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 3109 to serve as special government employee (SGE) members. DACOWITS members who are full-time or permanent part-time Federal civilian officers or employees, or active duty members of the Uniformed Services, shall be appointed pursuant to 41 C.F.R. § 102-3.130(a) to serve as RGE members. The DoD Appointing Authority shall appoint the DACOWITS' leadership from among the membership previously appointed in accordance with DoD policy and procedures, for a term of service of one-to-two years, with annual renewal, not to exceed the member's approved appointment.

All members of the DACOWITS are appointed to exercise their own best judgment, without representing any particular point of view, and to discuss and deliberate and in a manner that is free from conflict of interest. With the exception of reimbursement of official DACOWITS-related travel and per diem, DACOWITS members serve without compensation.

**Subcommittees:** The DoD, when necessary and consistent with the DACOWITS' mission and DoD policy and procedures, may establish subcommittees, task forces, or working groups ("subcommittees") to support the DACOWITS. Establishment of subcommittees shall be based

upon a written determination, to include terms of reference (ToR), by the DoD Appointing Authority or the USD(P&R), as the DACOWITS's Sponsor. All subcommittees operate in accordance with the FACA, the Sunshine Act, governing Federal statutes and regulations, and DoD policy and procedures. If a subcommittee duration, as determined by the ToR, exceeds that of the DACOWITS and the DoD does not renew the DACOWITS, then the subcommittee shall terminate when the DACOWITS does.

Individual appointments to serve on DACOWITS subcommittees, which are separate and distinct from appointments to the DACOWITS itself, shall be approved by the DoD Appointing Authority for a term of service of one-to-four years, with annual renewals, in accordance DoD policy and procedures. No member shall serve more than two consecutive terms of service on the subcommittee, unless approved by the DoD Appointing Authority. Subcommittee members who are not full-time or permanent part-time Federal civilian officers or employees, or active duty members of the Uniformed Services, shall be appointed as experts or consultants pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 3109 to serve as SGE members. Subcommittee members who are full-time or permanent part-time Federal civilian officers or employees, or active duty members of the Uniformed Services, shall be appointed pursuant to 41 C.F.R. § 102-3.130(a) to serve as RGE members. The DoD Appointing Authorities shall appoint the subcommittee leadership from among the membership previously approved to serve on the subcommittee in accordance with DoD policy and procedures, for a one-to-two year term of service, with annual renewal, which will not exceed the member's approved appointment.

Each subcommittee member is appointed to exercise their own best judgement on behalf of the DoD, without representing any particular point of view, and to discuss and deliberate in a manner that is free from conflicts of interest. With the exception of reimbursement of travel and per diem related to the DACOWITS or its subcommittees, subcommittee members shall serve without compensation.

Subcommittees shall not work independently of the DACOWITS and shall report all of their advice and recommendations solely to the DACOWITS for its thorough deliberation and discussion at a properly noticed and open DACOWITS meeting. Subcommittees have no authority to make decisions and recommendations, orally or in writing, on behalf of the DACOWITS. Neither the subcommittee nor any of its members may provide updates or report directly to the DoD or any Federal officer or employee, wither orally or in writing. If a majority of DACOWITS members are appointed to a particular subcommittee, then that subcommittee may be required to operate pursuant to the same notice and openness requirements of FACA which govern the DACOWITS' operations.

The USD(P&R) has established three permanent subcommittees. While the number of individuals appointed to each subcommittee may vary, as determined by the DoD Appointing


Authority, no individual subcommittee shall have more than 15 members. The three permanent subcommittees are:

1. **Employment and Integration**—This subcommittee, when tasked in accordance with DoD policy and procedures, will examine the Military Services' gender integration efforts to determine whether existing policies and programs inhibit the full integration of servicewomen into all military career fields, and identify innovative solutions as necessary. In addition, the subcommittee will review occupational policies and programs that may limit servicewomen's career progression. Members shall have experience in the military or with women-related workforce issues, specifically pertaining to the employment and integration of women serving in the Armed Forces.
2. **Recruitment and Retention**—This subcommittee, when tasked in accordance with DoD policy and procedures, will examine current military recruitment and retention programs to determine whether existing policies and procedures inhibit the recruitment and retention of servicewomen. In addition, the subcommittee will identify innovative solutions to increase women's propensity to serve and further expand opportunities for women to continue serving. Members shall have experience in the military or with women-related workforce issues, specifically pertaining to recruitment and retention.
3. **Well-Being and Treatment**—This subcommittee, when tasked in accordance with DoD policy and procedures, will examine whether existing DoD and Military Services institutional policies and procedures safeguard the well-being and treatment of servicewomen, and provide recommended policy changes as gaps are identified. Members shall have experience in the military or with women-related workforce issues, specifically pertaining to well-being and treatment.

**Recordkeeping:** The records of the DACOWITS and its subcommittees shall be managed in accordance with General Records Schedule 6.2, Federal Advisory Committee Records, or other approved agency records disposition schedule, as well as the appropriate DoD policies and procedures. These records will be available for public inspection and copying, subject to the Freedom of Information Act of 1966 (5 U.S.C. § 552, as amended).

**Filing Date:** April 22, 2022





A New Jersey Army National Guard soldier participates in a weapons qualification at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., Oct. 8, 2023.

# Executive Summary



# Executive Summary

The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) (hereafter referred to as the “Committee” or “DACOWITS”) was established in 1951 with a mandate to provide the Secretary of Defense (SecDef) with independent advice and recommendations on matters and policies relating to the recruitment of servicewomen in the Armed Forces of the United States. Since its inception, the Committee’s charter has expanded to include a focus on recruitment and retention, employment and integration, and the well-being and treatment of U.S. servicewomen. The Committee is authorized up to 20 members who are appointed by the SecDef and serve in a voluntary capacity for a 4-year term, which is renewed annually.

Each year, the SecDef, via the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD(P&R)), provides the Committee study topics to examine during the following year. In 2023, DACOWITS studied seven topics. The Committee gathered information from multiple sources in examining these topics—for example, briefings and written responses from Department of Defense (DoD) and Service-level military representatives, data collected from focus groups and interactions with Service members during installation visits, and peer-reviewed literature.

Based on the data collected and analyzed, DACOWITS offers 26 recommendations. Each recommendation, along with a brief synopsis of the supporting reasoning for each, follows. A detailed description of the reasoning supporting each

recommendation is provided in the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

## DACOWITS 2023 Recommendations

### Recruitment and Retention

#### Recruitment Initiatives to Increase Women’s Propensity to Serve

##### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should direct the Military Services to review and revise their enlisted accessions programs to incorporate best practices from the Army’s Future Soldier Preparatory Course to increase the pool of qualified applicants.***

##### Synopsis

Recruitment for the Military Services is at its lowest since the implementation of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) in 1973. Three major factors disqualify candidates from joining the military—inability to meet academic, physical fitness, or body fat standards. DACOWITS commends the Army for its implementation of an innovative program to increase the pool of propensed, yet unqualified or underqualified, recruits to join the Army while maintaining current academic and physical fitness accession standards. The Future Soldier Preparatory Course (FSPC) prepares potential recruits academically and physically prior to basic

training through a 3-week course. The Navy began a Future Sailor Preparatory Course in 2023, modeled after the Army's program. DACOWITS believes the other Military Services would benefit from adopting similar programs as a way to increase the recruitable population, especially in today's challenging recruiting environment.

A detailed reasoning supporting this recommendation is provided in Chapter 3 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

#### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should assign an Assistant Secretary of Defense-level official to coordinate and synchronize Department of Defense and Service efforts to increase and inspire our Nation's youths' propensity to serve.***

#### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should implement the military service recommendations published by the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service's Final Report, "Inspired to Serve," to more effectively educate and inspire America's youth to serve in the Military Services.***

#### Synopsis

DACOWITS remains concerned about the declining numbers of young adults eligible and interested in military service. The DoD Office of People Analytics (OPA) reports that, in 2020, 23 percent of 17- to 24-year-olds met minimum service qualifications without a waiver. In response to these recent trends in propensity and eligibility to serve, DACOWITS believes recruitment rates could be improved with coordinated

and synchronized efforts to encourage propensity and inspiration for service among America's youth. DACOWITS also endorses implementation of the military service recommendations in the "Inspired to Serve" report from the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service (NCMNPS) as part of this effort.

A detailed reasoning supporting these recommendations is provided in Chapter 3 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

#### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should direct the Military Services to develop and implement consistent policies regarding the accession of single custodial parents, with the intent of maximizing the opportunity for potential single custodial parent recruits—especially women—to serve, in order to increase the pool of qualified recruits.***

#### Synopsis

DACOWITS recognizes the impacts of declining recruitment rates across the Military Services and encourages the Services to reduce unnecessary barriers for potential recruits. In 2016, DACOWITS recommended the Military Services adopt a policy to increase the accession of single custodial parents. Without these policies or waivers, parents are required to surrender full legal custody of their children to join the military. While some progress has been made since 2016, policies on single custodial parent accessions still vary widely across the Military Services, and the Committee believes they continue to be unnecessarily restrictive. Barriers to single custodial parent accessions disproportionately affect potential female recruits because women

are much more likely to be single custodial parents than men. Implementing consistent policies across the Military Services and allowing more single custodial parents to serve could increase the pool of qualified recruits, ultimately strengthening the military's talent pool and readiness.

A detailed reasoning supporting this recommendation is provided in Chapter 3 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

## Employment and Integration

### Gender Integration

#### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should direct the Marine Corps to integrate recruit training at the platoon level, where recruits are formed into integrated platoons after basic daily routine. Maximizing integration, at the platoon level, develops the foundation of a successfully integrated Force. This would be a milestone toward compliance with the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act directing the Marine Corps to not segregate training by gender.***

#### Synopsis

DACOWITS commends the Marine Corps' recent progress toward gender-integrated recruit training, beginning with the first integrated company at Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) Parris Island in 2019. However, male and female recruits train in gender-segregated platoons, which reduces the opportunity for recruits to develop mutual respect and cohesion for one another during this formative training process. DACOWITS recommends the Marine Corps fully integrate recruit training by

gender at the platoon level—like the other Military Services—to best prepare recruits for operating in an integrated fleet. The Committee believes the Marine Corps' current integrated company model with gender-separate platoons does not meet a true definition of integration nor the intent of Congressional legislation.

A detailed reasoning supporting this recommendation is provided in Chapter 4 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

#### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should direct the Marine Corps to institute mixed-gender drill instructor teams for all integrated companies at recruit training to reinforce the operational environment and present women and men as equally capable and competent Marines and leaders. This would be a milestone toward compliance with the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act directing the Marine Corps to not segregate training by gender.***

#### Synopsis

DACOWITS recognizes the Marine Corps has made progress integrating recruit training by gender among recruits with the company-integrated model. However, recruits remain separated by gender in platoons, and drill instructor teams are also segregated by gender (e.g., female drill instructors are assigned only to female platoons). The Committee believes mixed-gender drill instructor teams are essential to providing recruits training and mentorship from opposite-gender role models as they prepare to enter an integrated operational environment. The other Services have trained with mixed-gender drill instructor



teams for decades, with both recruits and drill instructors reporting positive benefits. Restricting drill instructor team assignments by gender hinders female drill instructors' ability to train recruits and promote to higher positions of leadership and creates unnecessary challenges for personnel staffing. DACOWITS recommends the Marine Corps continue its efforts to integrate recruit training by assigning mixed-gender drill instructor teams to integrated companies.

A detailed reasoning supporting this recommendation is provided in Chapter 4 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

#### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should establish a working group focused on women in special operations forces (SOF), led by the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. This group should comprise Service SOF communities, Special Operations Command, and the Joint Staff to provide strategic oversight on and direction of current integration plans and challenges, metrics, lessons learned, and best practices. This would enhance recruitment, integration, growth, and retention of women in SOF.***

#### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should implement all recommendations from the 2022 Government Accountability Office report on Women in Special Operations, which would increase women serving in previously closed special operations forces positions.***

#### Synopsis

DACOWITS is concerned about the inconsistent and lack of DoD oversight of

SOF integration efforts. Recruitment and qualification of women in SOF communities have remained slow, and in some cases, are nonexistent. Despite the 2016 policy changes mandating the integration of women into all military specialties, gender integration implementation gaps persist within SOF, and cultural and social challenges remain. Responsibility and oversight of gender integration implementation currently resides with the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD(SO/LIC)) and U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM); however, no authority, fiscal resources, or leadership exists for these commands to direct the Military Services to improve recruitment, integration, or retention of women in SOF. Greater leadership and collaboration are needed to strengthen our Nation's warfighting capability by fully integrating, growing, and retaining women in SOF.

A detailed reasoning supporting these recommendations is provided in Chapter 4 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

#### Women in Aviation

##### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should establish a joint working group within the Office of the Secretary of Defense to synchronize and expedite the development, distribution, and accessibility of female-specific aviation gear. These efforts will maximize human performance, combat lethality, and readiness and ensure the overall health of servicewomen in aviation.***

## Synopsis

Women have been serving in aviation for 50 years, yet significant barriers persist in equipping the female-aviation force with functional, well-fitting, gender-specific gear they need to execute the mission. While the Military Services—particularly the Air Force and Navy—have made progress in the development of new gear, stagnation and production delays plague these efforts. Duplicative Service efforts cost DoD more time and money, while still not solving the problem of getting needed gear to female aviators. A lack of properly fitting gear, such as in-flight bladder relief systems, reduces combat lethality and increases the potential for short- and long-term health issues in the female aviation force. Establishing a dedicated joint working group would help coordinate and expedite the design, production, and distribution of necessary female-specific aviation equipment.

A detailed reasoning supporting this recommendation is provided in Chapter 4 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

## Physical Fitness Standards

### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should adopt a Department-wide, contemporary, scientifically based body composition standard and measurement technique to reflect gender, racial, and ethnic differences of today's Force because current policies and practices disproportionately affect servicewomen's health and military careers.***

## Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should decouple the physical fitness and body composition (B/C) program by reassigning B/C policy development and execution to medical professionals. This will ensure consistent and precise measurement, provide servicewomen with relevant gender-based resources, and promote greater focus on the holistic health pillars of Total Force Fitness.***

### Synopsis

DACOWITS encourages the DoD to establish a Department-wide and science-based body composition standard and measurement technique that accounts for the diversity of today's force. The military's body composition standards have not adequately accounted for gender, racial, and ethnic differences in body types, which has disproportionately affected servicewomen. Current science demonstrates widely used metrics, such as body mass index (BMI), inaccurately measure body fat for some groups. Implementing scientifically based body composition standards and decoupling body composition from physical fitness assessments will better align with the military's holistic health approach to Total Force Fitness (TFF). Updated body composition standards and measurement techniques will also mitigate unhealthy behaviors some Service members use to meet standards that put their health and operational readiness at risk.

A detailed reasoning supporting these recommendations is provided in Chapter 4 of the full annual report for 2023, which is

available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

## Well-Being and Treatment

### Pregnancy in the Military

#### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should direct immediate implementation of the Candidates Afforded Dignity, Equality and Training (CADET) Act retroactive to December 27, 2022, to include grandfathering affected cadets and midshipmen, and publish guidance for the development of new policies related to pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum care and, more immediately, provide leave with healthcare for a cadet's or midshipman's period of pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum care, as well as healthcare coverage for the child.***

#### Synopsis

The deadline for implementation of the CADET Act was December 27, 2022; however, as of the Committee's vote on this recommendation in September 2023, the law had not yet been implemented, and no DoD directive or guidance had been issued. During the publication of this report, DoD revised DoDI 1322.22 on November 1, 2023, allowing cadets and midshipmen the option to maintain parental rights if they become biological parents while attending an MSA. The CADET Act effectively ends previous policies forcing students at the Military Service Academies (MSAs) to permanently withdraw or give up their children should they become pregnant or father a child. DACOWITS commends the MSA's efforts to comply with the intent of the CADET Act ahead of its implementation while awaiting DoD policy change.

A detailed reasoning supporting this recommendation is provided in Chapter 5 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

#### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should establish a more robust women's healthcare directory on Military OneSource to include topics such as reproductive health, pregnancy, mental health, and contraceptive care. This directory should provide information and links to all Department of Defense, Service, and Defense Health Agency resources, information, and publications to more effectively aid servicewomen in locating and easily navigating to relevant healthcare information.***

#### Synopsis

DACOWITS recognizes the importance of ensuring servicewomen have ready access to information about women's healthcare resources, their TRICARE coverage, and related benefits. The Committee commends recent improvements from DoD in the amount of available information specific to women's healthcare. However, this information is scattered across various DoD and Military Services' websites, potentially making it difficult or confusing for servicewomen to find the information they need when they need it. Centralizing links to women's healthcare information on Military OneSource—a well-known, well-marketed DoD directory recognized as a “one-stop shop”—can improve servicewomen's knowledge about the health information available to them and further enhance use of these existing resources.



A detailed reasoning supporting this recommendation is provided in Chapter 5 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

## Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should: (1) direct the Defense Health Agency (DHA) to publish guidance for the Services, their medical providers, commanders, and pregnant servicewomen regarding the necessity, authorization, and recommended minimum length of maternity convalescent leave (CONLV) for birth events; (2) prescribe necessary procedures to ensure servicewomen who give birth in civilian facilities receive the necessary maternity CONLV; and (3) require the Services, with DHA guidance, to define the limited circumstances under which commanders may disapprove maternity CONLV or, preferably, prohibit commanders from denying recommended maternity CONLV.***

## Synopsis

Parental leave and maternity CONLV are important benefits available to new parents in the military. These benefits serve distinct purposes: parental leave provides birth and nonbirth parents time to bond with their new child, while maternity CONLV provides time for the birth parent's physical and mental recovery from childbirth. Recent legislation revised previous maternity CONLV policies by removing the 6-week minimum, requiring recommendation by a medical provider for a diagnosed medical condition, and making maternity CONLV authorization dependent on approval from commanders. DACOWITS believes further action is required to ensure servicewomen are afforded the necessary time they need to recover from birth events, are not unreasonably denied maternity

CONLV, do not face pressures to combine maternity CONLV and parental leave, or have to sacrifice their maternity CONLV due to their entitlement to extended parental leave.

A detailed reasoning supporting this recommendation is provided in Chapter 5 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

## Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should issue additional guidance to the Military Services on implementation of the Family Care Plans Instruction (DoDI 1342.19) to ensure the policy is being utilized as intended for operational readiness, program elements are tracked adequately, Department guidance is executed consistently across the Services, and policy application is aligned to appropriately support Service members.***

## Synopsis

DACOWITS continues to be interested in ensuring family care plans (FCPs) are being used appropriately. FCPs are tools intended to support Force readiness, by ensuring a caretaker is available for dependents of Service members during activities that take them away from home, such as deployments or training. However, DACOWITS believes FCPs are being used inappropriately to undermine and stigmatize Service members, in particular servicewomen. Service members have reported inappropriate applications of the FCP, including FCP requests for short-term absences such as caring for a sick child or FCPs being used as a determining factor for training or school selection. Implementation and enforcement of FCPs also vary

considerably across the Military Services, and women are disproportionately affected by voluntary or involuntary separations due to parenthood status. In 2017, the Committee recommended a review be conducted to ensure FCPs were being used appropriately. The Committee maintains its stance on this topic and believes additional DoD guidance will help ensure FCPs are implemented as intended and are being used uniformly across the Military Services.

A detailed reasoning supporting this recommendation is provided in Chapter 5 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

#### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should direct the Military Services to update maternity uniforms to present a professional, modern appearance while providing functionality, comfort, and ease of movement for the wearers.***

#### Synopsis

Functional, well-fitting uniforms are essential to ensure Service members are protected, and comfortable, and can take pride in their professional appearance. Military pride is essential to individual and unit morale and directly impacts unit cohesion, retention, and recruiting. Maternity uniforms, while temporary in use, should afford pregnant servicewomen the same level of function and professionalism as regular nonmaternity uniforms. DACOWITS has made several recommendations related to women's uniform items and identified maternity uniforms as a continuing concern in 2016 and 2019. While some progress

has been made toward improving the functionality and professional appearance of maternity uniforms since 2019, more work is needed. Recent updates and revitalization efforts to modernize maternity uniforms are inconsistent across the Military Services, and some uniform items continue to be outdated, lacking proper functionality and fit.

A detailed reasoning supporting this recommendation is provided in Chapter 5 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

#### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should direct the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to closely monitor Service implementation of DTM 23-001, Expansion of the Military Parental Leave Program, to ensure timely issuance of final policy directives, consistency of key policy elements and processes across the Services (e.g., disapproval authorities and appeals, distinction between maternity convalescent and parental leave), and proper implementation of legislative intent.***

#### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should direct that only a senior Service leader (first O-6 in the chain of command) be authorized to disapprove Service members' parental leave requests for incremental or single block parental leave to ensure reasonableness of disapproval actions and consistency of policy application across the Military Services.***

## Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should direct the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to routinely survey Service members to assess whether those eligible for parental leave have been treated equitably by their chain of command and were not unreasonably denied or discouraged from taking their full parental leave entitlements.***

## Synopsis

DACOWITS applauds the recent expansion of paid parental leave for both birth and nonbirth parents to 12 weeks. The Committee seeks to ensure that parental leave benefits are being provided consistently and equitably to all Service members and that Service members feel comfortable taking the full amount of leave allotted to them if desired. Service members in DACOWITS' 2023 focus groups reported facing pressure from their units to forgo some or all of their parental leave benefit or take incremental leave as opposed to block leave. Implementation of expanded parental leave should be closely monitored and routinely assessed by DoD to ensure the Military Services uphold the legislative intent that Service members are being authorized to fully maximize use of this benefit. DoD should also direct the Military Services to place disapproval authority with the first O-6 in a Service member's chain of command to emphasize the importance of affording parental leave to Service members and denying only when necessary or in limited, well-substantiated cases.

A detailed reasoning supporting these recommendations is provided in Chapter 5 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

## Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should direct the Defense Health Agency to further study and take proactive action to improve quality of and access to care for servicewomen's unique reproductive healthcare needs (e.g., fertility, assisted reproductive technology, pregnancy, depression) that could adversely impact their well-being, readiness, and retention.***

## Synopsis

Supporting the reproductive healthcare needs of servicewomen is an essential aspect of maintaining force readiness and retaining women in the military. Limited research exists on the reproductive healthcare needs and challenges of servicewomen. The 2020 "Women's Reproductive Health Survey (WRHS) of Active Duty Service Members" was the first DoD-wide survey of servicewomen in more than 20 years and findings on contraceptive use, pregnancy, and infertility indicate more research is warranted. Servicewomen in DACOWITS' 2023 focus groups reported significant barriers to accessing basic reproductive healthcare services, including maternity care, obstetric and gynecological services, and fertility care. Further study and action to improve access and quality of care are essential to improve servicewomen's well-being, readiness, and retention.

A detailed reasoning supporting this recommendation is provided in Chapter 5 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).



## Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should direct the USD(P&R) to review, and revise as needed, DoD and Military Services' parental leave and operational deferment policies to ensure they do not adversely impact servicewomen's career progression, including training, professional education opportunities, promotions, and performance evaluations.***

## Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should direct a study of the feasibility of and the implementing actions necessary to establish programs enabling servicewomen to (1) transfer from the Active to Reserve Component for a temporary period and (2) elect a later promotion year group to recover lost training, education, or operational opportunities resulting from pregnancy duty reassignments, operational deferments, and maternity convalescent and parental leave absences.***

## Synopsis

Service members continue to report pregnancy negatively affects a servicewoman's career trajectory. In particular, findings from DACOWITS' 2023 focus groups noted three major areas that present challenges related to pregnancy and career progression: (1) promotion and career advancement; (2) removal from key roles, leadership opportunities, and advanced training; and (3) physical fitness test requirements for schools and training. Lost time and work experience from pregnancy and the postpartum period compound, affecting servicewomen's evaluations and promotion potential, leaving women at a disadvantage relative

to their male peers. DACOWITS recommends the SecDef take more proactive action to identify and remove unnecessary career barriers and employ innovative solutions to ensure servicewomen's careers are not impacted as a result of a temporary medical condition, such as pregnancy.

A detailed reasoning supporting these recommendations is provided in Chapter 5 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

## Gender Discrimination

### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should direct the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to update Department of Defense policies to: (1) distinguish between sexual harassment and gender-based discriminatory harassment; (2) define how gender-based, nonsexual discriminatory harassment can occur; and (3) clarify reporting mechanisms so that Service members can better comprehend, identify, and report discriminatory behavior.***

### Synopsis

DACOWITS recognizes that DoD and the Military Services have various policies and support resources in place related to harassment. However, the Committee believes updates and clarifications delineating gender-based discriminatory harassment as separate from sexual harassment would benefit Service members and the military as a whole. Gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment are often conflated—harassment against women does not need to be sexual in nature

to harm servicewomen and engender a toxic environment and culture. Many support resources, such as hotlines, are branded or known for sexual harassment even if they serve as support for other forms of harassment and prohibited discrimination. Comprehensive, updated policies and trainings about the types and means of gender-based discriminatory harassment can help Service members identify and confidently report any inappropriate behaviors to ensure perpetrators receive appropriate consequences and make the military a safer and more professional work environment for all Service members.

A detailed reasoning supporting this recommendation is provided in Chapter 5 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

#### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should direct the Military Services' senior leadership to support and foster women's barrier analysis/initiative teams in order to identify and remediate unique challenges faced by servicewomen.***

#### Synopsis

While the DoD and Military Services have made recent strides in updating numerous policies related to servicewomen, more work remains to remove unnecessary barriers and eliminate antiquated policies. The Department of the Air Force (DAF) Women's Initiative Team (WIT) has shown the power of harnessing Service members'

experiences in an organic working group to elevate concerns and policy solutions to senior champions who are prepared to take action. A unique strength of barrier analysis working groups or WITs is their ability to use sustained effort and focus to identify issues from the ground level. Equally as important is connecting these groups with senior leaders and champions who can effectively make policy and programmatic changes. DACOWITS feels it is imperative for the Military Services to have dedicated, sustained groups working to identify and eliminate barriers impeding the recruitment, retention, employment, integration, well-being, and treatment of servicewomen.

A detailed reasoning supporting this recommendation is provided in Chapter 5 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).

#### Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should direct the USD(P&R) to conduct (1) a comprehensive review of promotion rates of Service members from the last 10 years across the Military Services, Reserve Component, and National Guard by gender, race/ethnicity, and occupational specialty/community to identify trends in servicewomen's career progression and promotion rates and (2) additional studies and research (e.g., via mock boards) to assess whether eliminating gender and race/ethnicity indicators in promotion board records reduces bias against women, in all of their diversity, in promotion selection.***

## Recommendation

***The Secretary of Defense should require the Military Services to provide education, in appropriate professional development courses, to Service members in supervisory enlisted and officer grades to prevent and reduce gender bias in performance evaluations and selection boards. Curriculum should (1) identify gendered language and descriptors, (2) describe how gender status expectations and biases can impact the way performance evaluations are written and rated, (3) indicate how to recognize and remediate unconscious bias and gender behavioral expectations, and (4) provide Service members the opportunity to participate in mock boards with postexercise analysis to enhance their learning experience.***

## Synopsis

The Committee recognizes the many initiatives and policy improvements the DoD and Military Services have undertaken in recent years to mitigate gender bias and its impact on the career progression of servicewomen. Research shows women in military and civilian workplaces continue

to face gender bias and discrimination in evaluation descriptions of their attributes, differential perceptions of competency as managers and leaders, and their overall promotion rates as compared with men. Current data shows mixed results as to whether women are promoted at equal rates in the military, but seems to be trending in a positive direction. However, Service members in DACOWITS' 2023 focus groups reported gender discrimination continues to affect the climate and culture of military units and negatively affects servicewomen's careers. While DoD and the Military Services have taken actions to remove photos from promotion records, used methods to mask gender information, and implemented bias training or education before promotion board meetings, more can and should be done to improve the career progression for women and eliminate corrosive cultural remnants of gender bias and discrimination in the military.

A detailed reasoning supporting these recommendations is provided in Chapter 5 of the full annual report for 2023, which is available on the DACOWITS website (<https://dacowits.defense.gov>).





Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services