

# **DEFENSE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WOMEN IN THE SERVICES (DACOWITS)**

## **Quarterly Meeting Minutes September 12–13, 2023**

The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) held a quarterly business meeting September 12–13, 2023. The meeting took place at the Association of the United States Army (AUSA) Conference Center, 2425 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, Virginia, 22201.

### **September 12, 2023**

#### **Welcome and Opening Remarks**

The DACOWITS Military Director and Designated Federal Officer (DFO), Lieutenant Colonel Samantha J. Frazier, Army, opened the September quarterly business meeting (QBM) by reviewing the Committee’s establishment and charter. LTC Frazier reminded those in attendance that any comments made during the meeting by Committee members are their personal opinions and do not reflect a DACOWITS or Department of Defense (DoD) position. Panelist and speaker remarks are not checked or verified for accuracy. LTC Frazier then turned the meeting over to the DACOWITS Chair, Ms. Shelly O’Neill Stoneman.

Ms. Stoneman welcomed everyone to the QBM and began by recognizing the recent 22nd anniversary of the September 11th attacks. She noted that while the events of that day transformed our nation, a deep-rooted instinct to help and be of service to others remains steadfast.

Ms. Stoneman asked all Committee members and meeting attendees to introduce themselves.

#### **Status of Requests for Information**

LTC Frazier reviewed the status of the Committee’s requests for information (RFIs). The Committee received responses to all seven of its RFIs. Responses to the RFIs were published on the DACOWITS website.

#### **Panel Briefing: Postpartum Convalescent Leave (RFI 4)**

The Committee requested a briefing from the Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA), Military Personnel Policy (MPP), Military Compensation Office (COMP), Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs (OASD HA), Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard on various topics related to medical convalescent leave (CONLV) for birth events. For example, the Committee asked for clarification on policy and medical guidance issued to the Military Services regarding CONLV, such as recommended duration, circumstances under which commanders may deny CONLV for birth events, how commanders document reasons for denied CONLV for birth events, and appeal mechanisms in place to address denied CONLV.

## MPP COMP

Ms. Jerilyn B. Busch, the Director of Military Compensation in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD(P&R)), briefed the Committee for MPP COMP.

Ms. Busch explained there have been several recent legal changes to parental leave and CONLV in the military. For example, in 2016 Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter established 12 weeks of CONLV for Service members as DoD policy, though the policy was not codified in law at the time of establishment. Following the establishment of this policy, Congress updated the law to establish 6 weeks of nonchargeable leave through primary caregiver leave and 3 weeks of nonchargeable leave through secondary caregiver leave for Service members who birthed or adopted a child. The updated law also allowed for up to 6 weeks of CONLV for Service members. More recently, the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) enacted in December 2021 established in law 12 weeks of parental leave for both the birth parent and nonbirth parent, but it replaced existing language about CONLV after birth with language stating CONLV can only be approved based on diagnosed medical conditions and after receiving written recommendations from healthcare providers. The 2022 NDAA indicated CONLV for birth events should be limited to the amount necessary for the recovery and convalescence of a birth parent. Although these legislative updates were passed in December 2021, they did not go into effect until December 2022 as a provision of the law.

Ms. Busch explained that the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) issued a policy based on the new parental leave and CONLV law in January 2023. The goal was to introduce the broad context under which the law could be implemented by the Military Services while still allowing them to issue specific guidance and policy in alignment with the broad DoD policy. Both new parental leave and maternity CONLV policies went into effect in January 2023, and DoD established a process for transferring Service members using primary or secondary caregiver leave into the new parental leave benefits. DoD also established the sequence of maternal leave, indicating CONLV after birth should begin immediately following a birth event, and the birth parent should transition to parental leave following the expiration of their CONLV. DoD did not establish a minimum or maximum length of time that maternity CONLV should last.

Ms. Busch noted commanders are required by law to limit the duration of CONLV after birth to the amount of time essential in relation to the Service member's medical diagnosis. CONLV is intended to provide Service members time to recuperate and recover from medical conditions before having to return to duty. The new parental leave and CONLV law provisions also require that DoD not establish in policy formulaic timelines for recovery and convalescence for any form of CONLV by relying on healthcare providers to provide written recommendations on when a Service member is likely to be able to return to duty based on their individual needs and recovery circumstances. Ms. Busch reiterated that DoD issued guidance about CONLV in the "Leave and Liberty Policy and Procedures," Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1327.06, in August 2023, and prior to that, issued a memorandum to the Services in early 2023 about new DoD parental leave and general convalescent leave policies.

Ms. Busch noted the law and DoDI do not indicate that CONLV after a birth event must be approved by commanders, but suggested DoD has confidence in its commanders to do the right thing and allow birthing parents to take CONLV after birth to ensure they are physically ready to return to duty. For example, Ms. Busch explained, when she had a complicated pregnancy and birth while in the military in 1996, she received nearly 6 months of paid, nonchargeable leave,

and her commander was supportive of the leave. Ms. Busch explained DoD's guidance that commanders have the ultimate responsibility for the health and welfare of Service members under their command has allowed DoD to maintain a relatively consistent CONLV policy for decades. In relation to general CONLV, Military Treatment Facility (MTF) commanding officers also have the authority to approve CONLV.

Ms. Busch concluded her briefing.

#### OASD HA

Ms. Kimberly R. Lahm, Program Director, Patient Advocacy and Experience for Women's, Child and Family Health Policy at OASD Health Affairs in the Defense Health Headquarters, briefed the Committee for OASD HA.

Ms. Lahm noted pregnancy and birth can have various levels of physiological and mental health impacts on birthing Service members depending on the circumstances surrounding their birth event. However, she indicated even servicewomen who experience smooth, uncomplicated pregnancies and birth events still require postpartum recovery time. Many servicewomen report feeling recovered within 6 to 8 weeks of the birth event for uncomplicated pregnancies, and Ms. Lahm noted CONLV after birth is an important aspect of postpartum care because it allows birthing parents to attend postpartum healthcare visits without being burdened by their work schedule to ensure they have positive maternal health outcomes.

Ms. Lahm emphasized CONLV is distinct from parental leave because it is intended to promote rest and recovery for the birthing parent from the physical and mental health impacts of the birth event. She added that CONLV after birth is necessary for birthing parents regardless of the outcome of the birth event, such as giving the child up for adoption, and to care for other conditions that the birth event may have been exacerbated.

Ms. Lahm reiterated that healthcare providers are required to make written recommendations to commanders to advise on the appropriate length of CONLV after birth based on ongoing clinical assessments of and conversations with the birth parent. Postpartum care is especially critical for assessing the appropriate amount of CONLV because it allows healthcare providers to see the birth parent multiple times after the birth event to assess their recovery, make adjustments to their treatment, and discuss any reservations the Service member might have about returning to duty.

Ms. Lahm referenced her briefing slide with a list of pregnancy-related conditions healthcare providers consider when making recommendations about the appropriate amount of CONLV after birth, including circumstances related to the birth event, such as excessive blood loss, or nonpregnancy-related conditions exacerbated during the pregnancy. Considering these circumstances helps healthcare providers make accurate, individualized recommendations for each birthing Service member.

Ms. Lahm concluded her briefing.

## Army

Mr. Larry L. Anderson Jr., Assistant Deputy for Military Pay and Compensation, briefed the Committee for the Army.

Mr. Anderson explained the Army is committed to providing optimal support for birthing Soldiers. The Army does not provide any guidance for commanders on circumstances under which they should deny CONLV after birth. Army policy also does not differentiate between CONLV recommendations from private healthcare providers and military healthcare providers. However, CONLV recommendations from private healthcare providers are annotated and transcribed by Army healthcare providers into the Army's system of record. In June 2023, the Army provided clarifying guidance to ensure consistent application of CONLV after birth and parental leave, including explaining that CONLV and parental leave are distinct nonchargeable periods of leave and that healthcare providers should not consider parental leave time when determining their recommendation for the appropriate amount of CONLV time after birth.

Mr. Anderson reiterated the Army does not provide guidance to commanders when to deny CONLV following birth but noted the Army's Integrated Personnel Pay System-Army (IPPS-A) requires commanders to provide a reason for denials. In the event that CONLV is denied, Soldiers are encouraged to escalate their leave request to a higher-level approval authority using IPPS-A. The Army highly recommends that any Soldier who experiences retaliation for submitting a second leave request report this incident to the Inspector General (IG) or submit an equal opportunity (EO) complaint.

Mr. Anderson noted, since publication of the clarifying guidance in June 2023, more than 3,500 Soldiers have used CONLV following a birth event with an average length of 6 weeks. Over the same period, more than 13,000 Soldiers have used parental leave. Six weeks remains the recommended timeline to recover from childbirth, and CONLV must be taken in one continuous period after the birth event. Conversely, Soldiers, including birth parents, nonbirth parents, those adopting minor children, and those fostering a child, are eligible for parental leave, which can be taken in one or more increments. Thus far, 54 percent of Soldiers have taken their parental leave in one continuous period. Mr. Anderson confirmed denial authority for CONLV after birth resides with the first general officer in a Soldier's command.

Mr. Anderson noted the Army recognizes there are still areas for improvement related to parental leave and CONLV, and the Army will continue investigating avenues for improving personnel policies, including by engaging with DACOWITS. He noted the Committee's input will help the Army refine its policies to better serve Soldiers and their families.

Mr. Anderson concluded his briefing.

## Navy

Commander Katie E. Schulz, Chief of the Office of Women's Health, briefed the Committee for the Navy.

CDR Schulz explained she is a certified nurse midwife and the Chief of the Office of Women's Health at the Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED). She clarified Navy Medicine

is also responsible for the care of Marines, so many Navy policies are also applicable to the Marine Corps.

CDR Schulz noted the Leave and Liberty Policies and Procedures (DoDI 1327.06) and the Navy's Military Personnel Manual provide overarching guidance on leave and liberty, though the Navy has not issued guidance specific to maternity CONLV. The Navy places trust in its commanders to make appropriate CONLV request decisions, recognizing that commanders understand the need to maintain a medically ready force to meet mission.

CDR Schulz reported Sailors may need to receive care outside of MTFs from private healthcare providers, and commanders do not consider whether recommendations for maternity CONLV come from private healthcare providers or military providers when approving or denying CONLV. If commanders or Sailors have concerns about CONLV recommendations from healthcare providers, Navy Medicine can review cases to provide medical recommendations on the appropriate amount of CONLV time given its familiarity with the unique demands of being a Sailor or Marine.

CDR Schulz noted the Navy released an administrative message (NAVADMIN 008/23) shortly after the release of the DoD directive expanding military parental leave to clarify that parental leave and CONLV are distinct and separate types of leave. This NAVADMIN helped address confusion about the appropriate recommendations for CONLV after birth following the removal of the automatic 6-week standard for CONLV. The Navy Surgeon General published an informational paper to clarify that CONLV after birth and parental leave serve distinct purposes and that CONLV should be recommended in the amount that facilitates the recovery and medical readiness of Sailors and Marines. The Surgeon General's recommendation for maternity CONLV is based on the Sailor's or Marine's gestational age at time of delivery and includes considerations for perinatal loss, but it is expected that healthcare providers individualize recommendations for Sailors and Marines based on their specific recovery needs. The Surgeon General's recommendations from the informational paper are currently being codified in a BUMED notice to be released within a few weeks.

CDR Schulz confirmed the Leave and Liberty Policies and Procedures (DoDI 1327.06) is the overarching guidance for all types of leave, including maternity CONLV. The Navy is not aware of any validated denials of CONLV after birth, so the Service has not provided any guidance on considerations for denying CONLV. Navy Medicine and commanders maintain a strong relationship to ensure commanders can coordinate with Navy Medicine to address concerns about CONLV recommendations. The Navy trusts its commanders to care for their Sailors to ensure they have access to mission-ready warfighters.

CDR Schulz explained that all types of leave requests, including maternity CONLV, are submitted through the Navy's electronic leave system. This system allows commanders to approve or deny CONLV requests and comment on their decision. However, the Navy does not require commanders to document approval or denial decisions. The system also allows Sailors to track CONLV denials. CDR Schulz noted the Navy does not have a specific policy or guidance for appealing CONLV denials. Therefore, Sailors are expected to follow the normal process for appealing decisions by moving their request up the chain of command.

CDR Schulz concluded her briefing.

### Marine Corps

Lieutenant Colonel Paige L. Thomas, Section Head for the Manpower Military Policy Branch, Manpower Plans and Policy Division in M&RA, briefed the Committee for the Marine Corps.

LtCol Thomas explained the Marine Corps has published two Marine Administrative Messages (MARADMINs 051/23 and 129/23) as guidance for the implementation of new parental leave policies and to clarify the purpose of CONLV after birth. The Marine Corps does not have any formal guidance for when a commander should deny CONLV after birth. All CONLV recommendations must be made in writing by either a private or a military healthcare provider. However, all requests for CONLV are reviewed by military healthcare providers given their unique knowledge of duty limitations and restrictions that may be necessary for service.

LtCol Thomas reiterated that the Marine Corps published two MARADMINs on the implementation of parental leave policies and clarification of the intent of maternity CONLV. The first MARADMIN 051/23 explains CONLV may be taken only in the period of time directly following a birth event, while the second MARADMIN 129/23 clarified that CONLV is distinct from parental leave and gives Marines the appropriate amount of time to recover from a birth event.

LtCol Thomas noted commanders are the approval authority for CONLV. The only guidance the Marine Corps provides commanders about CONLV denial is that commanders should not deny a Marine's maternity CONLV request solely based on their eligibility for parental leave. Commanders are not required to document reasons for denying CONLV requests, but there is an area where commanders can justify their decision if desired. However, commanders may be required to justify their decision if a Marine files a formal inquiry or grievance following a denied CONLV request. The Marine Corps does not have a grievance or appeal process specifically for CONLV denials, but Marines may use general grievance processes to appeal the commander's denial up to the first general officer in their chain of command.

LtCol Thomas concluded her briefing.

### Department of the Air Force (DAF)

Lieutenant Colonel Corey S. Everage, Deputy Chief in the Military Compensation Policy Division, briefed the Committee for the DAF.

Lt Col Everage noted the DAF does not provide guidance to commanders on circumstances under which they can deny maternity CONLV to avoid indicating denial of CONLV is an option. The DAF recognizes expert perspectives from healthcare providers are critical to ensure the health and readiness of the Air Force. The DAF does not have any evidence that a commander has denied any Airman's or Guardian's CONLV requests, showing commanders understand and value the role healthcare providers play in recommending CONLV. The DAF also recognizes the value private healthcare providers have to Airmen and Guardians, so the Service does not distinguish between private and military healthcare provider recommendations for CONLV. However, Lt Col Everage acknowledged military healthcare providers might change some private healthcare provider recommendation requests to ensure they meet DAF requirements.

Lt Col Everage confirmed the DAF provides guidance on CONLV after birth, including DAF Instruction (DAFI) 36-3003, which describes the overarching policy for CONLV in the Department of the Air Force. CONLV is granted by a commander or MTF director and approved by a commander. CONLV is generally approved for up to 30 days but can be extended beyond 30 days if necessary for recovery. Air Force Manual 41-210 describes recommended CONLV timelines for every period of gestation, including a recommended CONLV of 6 weeks following the birth of a child.

Lt Col Everage confirmed the DAF does not provide guidance to commanders on circumstances under which CONLV can be denied following the birth of a child. The DAF recognizes that commanders understand how important it is for birthing parents to have time to recover after a birthing event and would not jeopardize the health and safety of the Airman or Guardian. The DAF has no evidence that a commander has denied a CONLV request following a birth event, and any denial of CONLV would bring the commander's judgment into question.

Lt Col Everage noted the DAF understands the safe recovery of birth parents is vital to the readiness of the force and would not do anything to jeopardize this readiness. Therefore, the DAF does not feel it is necessary to include language in its policies and guidance requiring commanders to document reasons for denying CONLV. However, justification for denial is required in the DAF's leave tracking database if a supervisor or commander denies an Airman's or Guardian's leave request. The DAF is not currently tracking any CONLV denials related to pregnancy in the database, and the Department hopes such denials never occur.

Lt Col Everage confirmed DAF does not believe it is necessary to document an appeal process for the denial of CONLV requests after birth because commanders and leaders understand the importance of providing birthing parents time to recover following the birth event. However, Airmen and Guardians can elevate concerns about being denied CONLV to the next level in their chain of command, and if they fear reprisal for elevating the concern, they can also elevate the concern to the level of the IG.

Lt Col Everage concluded his briefing.

### Coast Guard

Lieutenant Commander Kia K. Ausley, Team Lead in the Office of Military Personnel, briefed the Committee for the Coast Guard.

LCDR Ausley confirmed the Coast Guard does not provide guidance on circumstances under which commanders can deny maternity CONLV, but Commandant Instruction (COMDTINST) M1000.8A, "Military Assignments and Authorized Absences," which is currently being rewritten, includes language that any denials of CONLV must be routed through the first O-6 officer in a Guardsman's chain of command.

LCDR Ausley noted Coast Guard policy does not distinguish whether recommendations for CONLV after birth leave must come from private or military healthcare providers. However, military healthcare providers may have the opportunity to review a private healthcare provider's CONLV recommendation. LCDR Ausley reiterated the Coast Guard is rewriting COMDTINST M1000.8A to align with the DoD parental leave and maternity CONLV policies.

LCDR Ausley reiterated the Coast Guard does not provide guidance on circumstances under which commanders can deny CONLV, but according to Coast Guard Office of Health Services, there have been no denials for CONLV after birth. The Coast Guard does not require commanders to document their reasons for denying CONLV, and there are no documented appeal mechanisms specifically focused on denied CONLV.

LCDR Ausley concluded her briefing.

### Discussion

Brigadier General (Ret.) Jarisse J. Sanborn asked why DoD policy cannot require birthing parents be granted maternity CONLV and provide a minimum baseline of time for CONLV with the understanding that birthing parents with complicated births may require more time. Ms. Busch highlighted it is important to consider how the law has changed recently, noting the provision of law under 10 U.S.C. § 701, including subsection H focused on parental leave and subsection M focused on general CONLV, must be considered within the context of each other. Therefore, the CONLV provisions state CONLV can only be authorized based on a diagnosed medical condition, which is broad enough to include childbirth and the associated recovery. The law also states CONLV should be tailored individually and not formulaic in how the length of CONLV is determined. Therefore, DoD relies on the healthcare community to provide guidelines and protocols for the appropriate application of maternity CONLV. Ms. Busch also noted the Military Services have approved CONLV for decades for a variety of medical conditions, including for birth mothers, nonbirth parents, men, and women. DoD wants to ensure Service members are allowed the appropriate amount of time to recover following the birth of a child before they return to full duty, but Service members should also return to duty as soon as possible. Ms. Lahm emphasized the importance of allowing flexibility in how healthcare providers recommend maternity CONLV. For example, some servicewomen may recover faster than the baseline recommended 6 weeks of CONLV and may desire to return to full or partial duty earlier than 6 weeks. Ensuring healthcare providers are able to continuously assess a Service member's recovery progression enables providers to make appropriate recommendations and provide any resources Service members may need, such as physical therapy, to continue their recovery before or while they go back to partial or full duty. Mr. Anderson confirmed the Army will continue to rely on its OASD HA counterparts to ensure the Service is making appropriate policy decisions to ensure Soldiers remain safe and commanders are empowered to make correct decisions.

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn asked whether it would be possible for DoD to publish a baseline minimum CONLV after-birth recommendation that women could waive to return to duty early if desired. Ms. Busch noted DoD formerly required 6 weeks minimum for maternity CONLV as a matter of policy, but CONLV has now been codified into law, which indicates the process for determining the length of CONLV cannot be formulaic. The Senate Committee on Armed Services indicated specifically that it was against the publication of any kind of formulaic CONLV minimum timelines. Ms. Lahm noted requiring a birth parent to complete a waiver when they are ready to return to duty could be a burden for the servicewoman and the Military Services. She also indicated birthing parents wanting to go back to duty before the end of their maternity CONLV is rare but could be identified through continuous conversations with medical providers during postpartum healthcare visits.



Dr. (Captain Ret.) Catherine W. Cox referenced the briefers' explanation that military healthcare providers transcribe recommendations from private healthcare providers to meet the requirements of each Military Service and asked how soon after those recommendations are received are they transcribed into military documents. CDR Schulz noted the timing of transcription can depend on where the military provider is located, but the process is simple. She noted birthing parents usually bring their private healthcare provider's recommendation into the military OB/GYN clinic for transcription. If a commander has questions or concerns about a CONLV recommendation, they can discuss those concerns with military providers.

Captain (Ret.) Kenneth J. Barrett asked CDR Schulz if the flexibility in the DoD's parental leave and maternity CONLV policy is helpful to the Services in identifying and implementing their own policies. CDR Schulz explained all changes to policy or law will result in confusion and interpretation challenges, but the Services were provided time to discuss the DoD policy updates and were provided guidance clarifying the differences between maternity CONLV and parental leave. She noted most commanders are familiar with women who have given birth in their Service and recognize it is normal for them to need time to recover following the birth event before returning to partial or full duty. She also noted servicewomen can return to partial duty if desired during their recovery. CDR Schulz indicated the Navy's commanders are learning more about the purpose and value of maternity CONLV and parental leave policies as they continue to be used and discussed.

Ms. Stoneman explained DACOWITS published a report on its website summarizing findings from 2023 focus groups with Service members from various military installations and learned that some Service members have not had positive results with the maternity CONLV and parental leave processes. She asked what advice the Service briefers would give to a pregnant servicewoman who cannot come to an agreement with her healthcare provider and commander on an appropriate length of maternity CONLV time after birth. Ms. Lahm noted, if a birth parent arrives for a postpartum appointment and tells the doctor they do not feel ready to return to duty, but the provider believes their recovery time has been sufficient, the servicewoman and provider will need to discuss why the Service member does not feel ready to return and determine whether the provider can help address this barrier. Mr. Anderson noted the Army encourages commanders to work with Soldiers to balance the mission of the Service with their recovery needs but also encourages Soldiers to speak with commanders to ensure their voice is heard and needs are met during their recovery. Ms. Stoneman asked what a Service member should do if the proposed avenues fail to meet a resolution. Mr. Anderson said the Army could work with OASD if the commander and Soldier cannot come to a mutual agreement to gather their feedback on the situation. Colonel Danielle K. Rodondi, Nurse advisor Army MR&A, Health Affairs, explained the Army has patient representatives at MTFs and clinics that Soldiers can meet with if they feel that their needs are not being met. The patient representatives and Soldier can discuss these issues with MTF commanders to find a resolution to the denied maternity CONLV request. CDR Schulz noted the Navy encourages Sailors and Marines to work with their military healthcare providers to advocate for them if commanders have concerns about CONLV requests. She confirmed the military providers have a strong working relationship with Navy commanders. The Office of Women's Policy (OWP) also has an email address (Navy\_OfficeofWomensPolicy@us.navy.mil) where Service members can submit questions about maternity CONLV. The OWP will coordinate with Navy Medicine to identify gaps or areas where commanders need more education. LtCol Thomas reiterated the Marine Corps falls under Navy Medicine for medical guidance. She noted she would advise a Marine to disclose

their reasons for not feeling ready to return to duty to their healthcare providers to determine if those challenges warrant additional CONLV. Marines can submit grievances for denied CONLV requests to the IG anonymously. Ms. Busch reiterated parental leave has a different purpose than maternity CONLV, and servicewomen typically transition from maternity CONLV to parental leave 6 to 8 weeks after the birth event. Therefore, servicewomen are usually not returning to work until 18 to 20 weeks after their birth event. However, DoD recognizes parental leave is not a substitute for maternity CONLV if a birth parent needs additional recovery time. Ms. Stoneman indicated some focus group members mentioned their transition between maternity CONLV and parental leave was not seamless. Lt Col Everage explained, if an Airman or Guardian reported a situation to him in which additional CONLV might be necessary, he would encourage them to explain their reasons for requesting more maternity CONLV to their healthcare providers to see whether they can access additional avenues to support healing. He also highlighted that DAF MTFs have patient advocates to listen to Airmen's and Guardians' concerns, so a servicewoman could discuss their CONLV concerns with a patient advocate if it were necessary to elevate the concern to a higher level for resolution. If their concern were still not resolved, the Airman or Guardian should communicate with their commander or first sergeant, who could engage with the medical community on their behalf to determine a resolution. Finally, if a Service member is not satisfied with their commander's support, the concern can be elevated up their chain of command, with the option to report a reprisal to the IG. LCDR Ausley noted the Coast Guard grants exceptions to the policy for a variety of reasons, so Guardsmen can articulate in writing why they need an exception to extend their maternity CONLV.

Brigadier General (Ret.) Allyson R. Solomon referenced the Army's claim that 3,500 Soldiers had used maternity CONLV following birth since March 2023. She asked where this information comes from and whether the other Services have similar systems that enable them to pull comparable data. Mr. Anderson confirmed the Army has access to this information in its leave records system, including data broken down by reason for maternity CONLV, such as pregnancy or adoption. LtCol Thomas confirmed the Marine Corps tracks this information in its Total Force System, including requests for maternity CONLV and parental leave. However, she noted it would take some analysis to determine whether maternity CONLV was used following a pregnancy because the data cannot be displayed this way in the system. Lt Col Everage confirmed the Air Force's LeaveWeb breaks down leave records by parental leave and maternity CONLV and by whether parental leave was taken after a birth event, long-term fostering, or adoption. LCDR Ausley noted the Coast Guard has a direct access system that tracks parental leave and maternity CONLV separately. CDR Schulz noted the Navy Standard Integrated Personnel System (NSIPS) tracks leave and differentiates between CONLV, maternity CONLV, and parental leave.

Dr. (Colonel Ret.) Samantha A. Weeks asked Lt Col Everage why the DAF recommends 42 days of maternity CONLV after a "live" birth event specifically, as opposed to a still birth. Lt Col Everage noted the guidance provided to the Committee comes from Air Force Manual (AFMAN) 41-210, "Tricare Operations and Patient Administration," but he was unsure why the guidance lists "live births" specifically.

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn noted her understanding that the DoDI 1327.06, updated in August 2023, indicates commanders cannot deny maternity CONLV, while the Military Services' guidance indicates commanders have the discretion to deny maternity CONLV requests. She asked how those two opposing directions can be reconciled. Ms. Busch noted DoD published and

updated the DoDI 1327.06 in August 2023, but the DoDI is undergoing a major rewrite, so the policy under reference requires updating to be consistent with the law. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn asked whether DoD plans to update language in the DoDI describing 12 weeks of parental leave and the fact that Service members may take parental leave in different increments. Ms. Busch confirmed the entire DoDI is being reviewed for updates.

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn referenced the Army's claim that only a general officer can deny parental leave requests and asked whether this includes both incremental parental leave requests and single-block parental leave requests. Mr. Anderson confirmed only a general officer can deny both incremental and single-block parental leave requests.

Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon asked Ms. Busch to clarify the aspect of the law that states maternity CONLV determinations cannot be formulaic. Ms. Busch confirmed DoD cannot set minimum and maximum lengths for CONLV, but that does not preclude DoD from referencing guidelines and protocols from the medical community. She noted the law mandates CONLV be determined on an individual basis.

The briefing discussion concluded.

### **Overview of Public Written Comments**

LTC Frazier reviewed the Committee's receipt of written public comments. DACOWITS received one public comment submission for this QBM.

The written public comment was provided by Major Crystal Pearl, Marine Corps, on Expansion of the Military Parental Leave Program and concerns related to the implementation of the policy.

This public comment is available on the DACOWITS website.

### **Conclusion of Public Meeting Portion**

LTC Frazier concluded the public portion of the meeting for the day.

September 13, 2023

### **Welcome and Opening Remarks**

The DACOWITS Military Director and DFO, LTC Frazier, began the second day of the September QBM. LTC Frazier reminded attendees that any comments made during the meeting by Committee members are their personal opinions and do not reflect a DACOWITS or DoD position. Panelist and speaker remarks are not checked or verified for accuracy. LTC Frazier then turned the meeting over to the DACOWITS Chair, Ms. Stoneman.

Ms. Stoneman welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked all Committee members and meeting attendees to introduce themselves.

### **2023 Vote on Recommendations**

Ms. Stoneman began the voting session by citing the historical significance and importance of the Committee's recommendations. Since 1951, the Committee has submitted more than 1,000 recommendations to the Secretary of Defense. Of those recommendations, approximately 97 percent have been either fully or partially implemented by DoD and Military Services. Committee members discussed and voted on the following recommendations.

#### **A. Recruitment Initiatives**

1. *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 (FSPC) to increase the pool of qualified applicants.*

Honorable (Colonel Ret.) Dawn E. B. Scholz moved to adopt the recommendation. Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon seconded the motion.

#### **Discussion:**

No discussion.

**Vote on Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to adopt the recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Final 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 (FSPC) to increase the pool of qualified applicants.*

2. *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.*

Lieutenant General (Ret.) Kevin W. Mangum moved to adopt the recommendation. Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon seconded the motion.

**Discussion:**

No discussion.

**Vote on Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to adopt the recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Final 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.*

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

LTG (Ret.) Mangum moved to adopt the recommendation. Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon seconded the motion.

**Discussion:**

Vice Admiral (Ret.) Robin R. Braun asked LTG (Ret.) Mangum when the Inspired to Serve report was completed and why it is important to adopt the recommendations. LTG (Ret.) Mangum responded the report was based on a national commission and published in 2020. He stated there are a number of recommendations related to military, public, and national service with five recommendations specifically focused on military service. The report outlines a whole-of-government approach to enhancing and inspiring youth to serve in the public sector, including military service. The Committee has queried the [Defense] Department on its actions thus far, and the Recruitment and Retention Subcommittee wants the Department should continue its efforts to implement the report's recommendations.

CAPT (Ret.) Barrett asked whether the Committee's research supports expanding JROTC [Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps] and other programs mentioned by the Inspired to Serve report, such as DoD STARBASE. LTG (Ret.) Mangum noted the report recommends the maintenance and expansion of a number of outreach programs, including JROTC. Expanding JROTC and other programs would require legislation and stronger efforts from the [Defense] Department. LTG (Ret.) Mangum indicated this recommendation could help with bolstering a need for legislation.

**Vote on Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to adopt the recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)

- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

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

4. *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.*

HON (Col Ret.) Dawn E.B. Scholz moved to adopt the recommendation. Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon seconded the motion.

**Discussion:**

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks asked for clarification on what is intended by “the pool of qualified recruits” language. She asked whether this recommendation is applied holistically to any single custodial parent or whether it specifically targeted at the enlisted force compared with the officer force or different forms of accession programs. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz affirmed it is limited to enlisted accessions because most of the Services do not have as many restrictions on single parent officers joining the military. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks indicated she was trying to assess whether the recommendation was focused on enlisted personnel or officers to determine whether clarifying language was needed if it was focused on enlisted recruitment and opportunities. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz stated the recommendation’s reasoning addresses this point and describes how single custodial parent accession policies vary by Military Service. She explained the recommendation could also help improve officer accession waivers, but right now it is focused on enlisted accessions because enlisted accession policies for single parents have greater variance across the Services. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks noted she asked this question because of the recent Candidates Afforded Dignity, Equality and Training (CADET) Act for the Military Service Academies (MSAs) and noted the recommendation as currently written without clarity between officer and enlisted personnel could cause problems for the [Defense] Department and the Services to execute. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz responded saying it was an excellent point.

CAPT (Ret.) Barrett asked whether there is a Service doing this well, noting the Air Force seems to have been mentioned as a best practice. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz responded the Air Force seems to have broader opportunities for single parents but also noted the Coast Guard recently opened a program that supports single parent accessions too. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz reiterated that single custodial parent accession policies vary among the Services, but the Air Force is a positive example.

**Vote on Recommendation:** The Committee voted to adopt the recommendation.

- Favored: 13 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman)
- Opposed: 1 (Weeks)

- Abstained: 0

**Final 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.*

## **B. Gender Integration**

5. *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 towards compliance with the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act directing the Marine Corps to not segregate training by gender.*

Ms. Marquette J. Leveque moved to adopt the recommendation. Command Master Chief (Ret.) Octavia D. Harris seconded the motion.

### **Discussion:**

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn asked for clarification on what aspects of recruit training are currently integrated. Ms. Leveque responded both Marine Corps Recruit Depots (MCRDs) are at a different stage of integration. She noted integration is primarily at the company level, which involves all-male platoons and all-female platoons training side by side. This recommendation is intended to promote integration at the platoon level so male and female recruits would fall out together in a gender-nonspecific platoon where they would train side by side at the platoon level in comparison with integration at the company level. Ms. Leveque noted the impact of having integration at the company level with male- and female-specific platoons is that a platoon of women will go through the training event followed by a platoon of men; recruits are not actually executing training events together. Instead, male and female recruits see one another and are around one another during training events, but they are not working side by side. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn asked how much time is spent in platoon versus company activities and whether recruits are spending the majority of their time in platoons. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris affirmed the majority of training time is spent at the platoon level. She noted the Marine Corps is not integrated at the platoon level like the other Services, and the Marine Corps has been directed to integrate at the platoon level by the NDAA.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz asked for clarification on the following phrase in the recommendation: “where recruits are formed into integrated platoons after basic daily routine.” She asked whether the recommendation wording should be “where” or “when,” noting “when” would be related to the time they want the integration to start. Ms. Leveque responded integrated platoons would be formed immediately following their basic daily routine where they would still be segregated for hygiene, showering, and sleeping but immediately fall out into integrated platoons after finishing those activities. Ms. Stoneman asked whether HON (Col Ret.) Scholz had an objection as written or suggested a clarification. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz responded the clarification on the wording was sufficient.

**Vote on Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to adopt the recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Final 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 towards compliance with the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act directing the Marine Corps to not segregate training by gender.*

6. *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 towards compliance with the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act directing the Marine Corps to not segregate training by gender.*

Ms. Leveque moved to adopt the recommendation. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris seconded the motion.

#### **Discussion:**

CAPT (Ret.) Barrett asked Ms. Leveque whether the NDAA mandates mixed-gender drill instructors or only mixed-gender training. Ms. Leveque responded the NDAA states the Marine Corps cannot segregate training by gender. She noted the words at the end of the recommendation come from the NDAA, which does not provide additional detail.

Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon asked Ms. Leveque if the Marine Corps is currently using female drill instructors to train male recruits. Ms. Leveque stated currently a same-gender drill instructor is assigned to the same-gender platoon; the current model being used at both MCRDs is female drill instructors training female recruits and male drill instructors training male recruits.

Dr. Trudi C. Ferguson asked whether the Marine Corps has articulated reasons that drill instructor integration is not happening at this time. Ms. Leveque stated the Marine Corps has provided several reasons in its briefing and RFI responses to the Committee—for example, a limited number of female drill instructors to implement a mixed-gender model. However, Ms. Leveque noted the University of Pittsburgh study published last year outlines a way mixed-gender drill instructor teams could be implemented today and would benefit the Marine Corps in providing additional flexibility for staffing drill instructors at the MCRDs. Dr. Ferguson asked for additional details about how mixed-gender drill instructor teams could be implemented, specifically requesting information from the University of Pittsburgh study. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris responded the Marine Corps formerly trained women in the 4th battalion only at MCRD Parris Island; however, that battalion was recently disestablished, and women are now trained at both MCRD Parris Island and San Diego. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris stated the Marine Corps now has



female drill instructors on both coasts, noting there should no reason why it would not have enough drill instructors to support integrated training.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum asked whether the last sentence of the recommendation, related to NDAA compliance, is appropriate or necessary, questioning whether drill instructor integration is related to compliance with the NDAA. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks responded it is open to interpretation with the NDAA stating to “not segregate training by gender.” She further elaborated that training may be interpreted to be segregated by gender when women train only women and men train only men. Based on the Committee and Subcommittee’s work and research, Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated ensuring men and women recruits are trained by men and women Marines provides the most effective fighting force and gender integration for the Marine Corps today and tomorrow.

CAPT (Ret.) Barrett moved to amend the recommendation to strike the last sentence, “This would be a milestone towards compliance with the 2020 NDAA directing the Marine Corps to not segregate training by gender.” LTG (Ret.) Mangum seconded the motion.

**Proposed Amended 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.*

**Discussion on Amendment:**

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks indicated she does not support the proposed amendment. During the Committee’s most recent visits to MCRDs Parris Island and San Diego, Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks explained that Committee members observed varying levels of integration among recruits at the MCRDs. She noted the ability to use the NDAA language in the recommendation supports the [Defense] Department’s ability to quickly understand the reality of the required gender integration at the MCRDs. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated the last sentence of the proposed recommendation promotes this integration and acknowledges it is a milestone toward full compliance with the NDAA and another step for the MCRDs’ integration because both Depots had different start times and context.

CMDCM (Ret.) Harris also disagreed with the proposal to remove the last sentence of the proposed recommendation because it is a milestone toward compliance. Having observed drill instructors at both MCRDs, CMDCM (Ret.) Harris stated there are female drill instructors within the current model who are not training because there are not enough female platoons. If female drill instructors were allowed to train male platoons, they would be more properly employed right now. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris said these female drill instructors are serving in support roles, which can lead to lower morale and could potentially impact their promotion opportunities if they are not training platoons and progressing at the same rate as their peers. She said including the last sentence acknowledges the Marine Corps is making progress toward full integration at all levels, not just recruits but also female drill instructors. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris suggested fully integrating means full integration at all levels.

Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox responded she is in favor of keeping the last sentence in the proposed recommendation because if you have mixed-gender drill instructor teams, they are still doing the training; it would not take away from anything.

VADM (Ret.) Braun stated she would agree to delete the sentence if the NDAA stated “recruits should not be segregated by gender.” However, she noted the NDAA says “training,” which is inclusive of instructors and recruits. Therefore, she supported leaving the sentence in.

Ms. Leveque noted the sister Services are fully integrated and train with mixed-gender drill instructor teams as part of their training and stated this is another point to support keeping the last sentence. Ms. Leveque said she is in favor of keeping the last sentence to indicate training involves all of what is being discussed.

VADM (Ret.) Braun shared with the Committee the Marine Corps has mixed-gender drill instructors at the company and above level, just not at the platoon level. She provided the example of a female sergeant major leading a company at Parris Island currently. VADM (Ret.) Braun specified it is only at the platoon level where there are not mixed-gender drill instructor teams.

CMDCM (Ret.) Harris stated words matter, noting Marine Corps leadership currently thinks they are integrated. The wording of the recommendation is giving the Marine Corps credit for the steps they have taken while still indicating where further steps are needed toward full integration. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris said, if the sentence is removed, the Marine Corps will still think they are fully integrated and in compliance with the NDAA. VADM (Ret.) Braun asked CMDCM (Ret.) Harris to clarify what she meant by Marine Corps leadership. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris responded she was referring to the Commanding Generals at MCRD San Diego and Parris Island.

CAPT (Ret.) Barrett thanked everyone for their thorough discussion. He noted he still has trouble with the wording of it being a milestone toward compliance if drill instructor integration is not specifically mentioned in the NDAA. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks wondered whether, based on CAPT (Ret.) Barrett’s comments, it would be more copacetic to say “this would be a milestone supporting the 2020 NDAA” to address all the points raised in discussion. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett agreed that would be an improvement, noting he was stuck on the word “compliance.”

**Vote on Amendment:** The Committee voted unanimously to oppose the amendment.

- Favored: 0
- Opposed: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Abstained: 0

**Discussion on Original Recommendation:**

CAPT (Ret.) Barrett moved to amend the recommendation striking the words “compliance with” in the second sentence, replacing them with “supporting.” Ms. Stoneman responded she disagrees with the wording change because this is the current statute on record. She noted it is black or white and necessitates “complying with” rather than “supporting of” legislation. Ms. Stoneman said “supporting of” has no weight to it, noting “a milestone in compliance with” is accurate as written and ties it to executing action.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum indicated the substantive issue is whether the Marine Corps is currently noncompliant with the NDAA. He said, if the Marine Corps is noncompliant,

the wording is fine, but if the Marine Corps is compliant, this wording is somewhat of a distraction. Ms. Leveque responded the Marine Corps is not compliant with the NDAA. She stated the Marine Corps currently has same-gender training, which is segregating training by gender. Ms. Leveque said, until gender is not part of how the Marine Corps operates, where it becomes Marines training recruits with no qualifications, it is not in compliance with the NDAA.

CMDCM (Ret.) Harris agreed the wording should remain “compliance with” because the Marine Corps is not in compliance; reiterating words matter. She noted the language gives the Marine Corps credit for moving toward compliance. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris emphasized the year of the NDAA being 2020. She also stated the Marine Corps paid millions of dollars for the University of Pittsburgh study, which also provided this recommendation. The Marine Corps has had opportunities to observe and visit the sister Services that operate with mixed-gender drill instructor teams, including the Army. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris said the wording should stand as is because there is no reason the Marine Corps cannot fully integrate.

VADM (Ret.) Braun made a point of order that there was no second on CAPT (Ret.) Barrett’s movement to amend the recommendation. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn seconded the motion.

**Proposed Amended 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 towards supporting the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act directing the Marine Corps to not segregate training by gender.*

**Vote on Amendment:** The Committee voted to oppose the amendment.

- Favored: 2 (Barrett, Mangum)
- Opposed: 12 (Anderson, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Abstained: 0

**Discussion on Original Recommendation:**

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn asked whether other wording in the statute or legislative history indicates whether training is broader than recruits and would apply to drill instructors. Ms. Leveque responded the current law is silent on that matter because there is no additional language defining what encompasses training. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn said she supports including the NDAA compliance language in the recommendation because it sends a signal that the Committee believes it is part of the spirit and intent of the statute. She noted it is a reasonable interpretation that training is the whole environment, not just the recruits but also those around them. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn elaborated it is putting personnel in roles where recruits can recognize and appreciate as part of their training that it is not just men who are leaders for men or women who are leaders for women. She said it is part of the training and cultural learning that goes with being recruits of mixed-gender drill instructor teams. She reiterated including this language sends the signal it is part of the direction toward integration even if it was not specifically addressed by the statute.

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks elaborated on Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn's points by citing feedback from the Committee's 2023 focus groups and visits to the MCRDs that segregation among recruits and in leadership opportunities leads to unhealthy perceptions of the opposite gender in the operational force. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks also stated separating training by gender appears to have the unintentional consequence of perpetuating feelings that men are superior to women and fostering fear and suspicion of women. Therefore, having mixed-gender drill instructors at the MCRDs would help establish a growing respect for leaders' competence and capability irrespective of their gender.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum asked about the word "compliance," stating if the recommendation read "to meet the spirit of the 2020 NDAA," that may be more accurate than "compliance." Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn suggested wording such as "compliance with the spirit of" as an alternative. LTG (Ret.) Mangum stated this could be a distraction to the Marine Corps if it believes it is compliant with the NDAA. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris responded the Marine Corps is not compliant, and it needs to be called out. She further elaborated, if the recommendation does not address compliance, the Marine Corps will continue to be not compliant because it thinks it is compliant. Ms. Stoneman expressed concern about watering down the language related to compliance because the spirit of it can get lost in what is actually stated in the law, noting her previous experience writing legislation on the Hill. She said this issue needs to be examined as to whether it is compliant. Ms. Stoneman noted this is why the Commandant of the Marine Corps invited the Committee to visit the MCRDs to see their gender integration, which is incorporated into the Subcommittee's work on this recommendation. Dr. Ferguson stated the Marine Corps' explanations and actions have demonstrated the Service considers it is doing integration in the spirit of the NDAA mandate, so this recommendation wording would be shifting them.

**Vote on Recommendation:** The Committee voted to adopt the recommendation.

- Favored: 12 (Anderson, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 2 (Barrett, Mangum)
- Abstained: 0

**Final 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 towards compliance with the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act directing the Marine Corps to not segregate training by gender.*

7. *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 be comprised of Service SOF communities, Special Operations Command, and the Joint Staff to provide strategic oversight on current integration plans and challenges, metrics, lessons learned, and best practices. This would enhance recruitment, integration, growth, and retention of women in SOF.*

Colonel (Ret.) Nancy P. Anderson moved to adopt the recommendation. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris seconded the motion.

## **Discussion:**

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn asked for an explanation of how a working group would be more effective than current efforts. Col (Ret.) Anderson responded the working group could be similar to what the Department of the Navy established related to integration of women in aviation, combatant ships, and submarines. It would involve deliberate planning, establishing milestones, gathering consensus, and identifying common patterns across special operations communities. Currently, each community is doing different things, which can make it challenging to compare and identify lessons learned about why women are not joining special operations and what might encourage them to join. Col (Ret.) Anderson stated a collaborative process could increase productivity of these efforts.

CAPT (Ret.) Barrett asked why USD(P&R) would lead this working group. Col (Ret.) Anderson responded the working group would involve personnel and readiness and allow for enough senior leaders from each special operations community to be involved to encourage collaboration. In response to CAPT (Ret.) Barrett's question, Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks shared, in 2013 and 2015, the DoD had oversight of women in previously closed career fields through the Women in Service Review (WISR). Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks explained, since the repeal of the combat exclusion law in 2016, these efforts have been stagnant with less oversight and direction across the Services and within specific areas of previously closed career fields. She noted a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report published in December 2022 recommended USD(P&R) be the office of responsibility for such a review because U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict (SO/LIC) are having difficulty leading these efforts and directing the Services to action. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated specifying USD(P&R) as the lead in the recommendation is supported by the GAO report to have an office of primary responsibility to continue the efforts from WISR.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz asked about the words "strategic oversight" in the recommendation. She inquired whether there was a more active verb, such as adding in the words "and direction" to strengthen what is desired from the working group. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks responded there is a required annual assessment identifying the oversight and office of primary responsibility highlighted in the Subcommittee's reasoning statement supporting this recommendation. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz noted adding the word "execution" to indicate the developed plans should be executed is also important, reiterating that stronger wording should be in the recommendation itself. Col (Ret.) Anderson asked whether HON (Col Ret.) Scholz wanted to propose an amendment. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz requested additional discussion before proposing an amendment but suggested adding language such as "to provide strategic oversight and direction" to the recommendation as currently written. Col (Ret.) Anderson noted "direction" would be difficult to add because each Special Operation Force is unique with its own lines of effort and context to consider. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz clarified she was referring to "strategic direction" as more active language, rather than just "oversight." She noted overseeing is broad, general language and asked for additional suggestions from the group for stronger wording. LTG (Ret.) Mangum agreed with HON (Col Ret.) Scholz that saying only "oversight" gives each SOF component space to continue to assess as opposed to directing it to take further action. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks affirmed she understood HON (Col Ret.) Scholz on language such as "provide strategic oversight and direction" or "strategic oversight and execution"; however, she proposed adding "and

execution” on “plans and challenges, metrics ...” and leaving the rest of the wording as is because those specific aspects of the recommendation are some of the actions that need to continue to progress women within previously closed SOF career fields.

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks moved to amend the recommendation by adding the words “and execution” after “strategic oversight.” Col (Ret.) Anderson seconded the motion.

**Proposed Amended 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 be comprised of Service SOF communities, Special Operations Command, and the Joint Staff to provide strategic oversight and execution on current integration plans and challenges, metrics, lessons learned, and best practices. This would enhance recruitment, integration, growth, and retention of women in SOF.*

**Discussion on Amendment:**

VADM (Ret.) Braun asked how they would provide “strategic execution” as opposed to “strategic direction.” Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated she interprets strategic oversight and execution for USD(P&R) as holding monthly working group meetings, understanding the Services’ progression, building milestones and checking in on progress toward the overall roadmap. She further explained, as long as the office of primary responsibility is ensuring progress is being made toward the roadmap, she would consider that execution. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris responded in agreement with VADM (Ret.) Braun’s comment that “strategic oversight and execution” is being strategic and action-oriented at the same time. She said the recommendation was intended for the working group to do both things.

**Vote on Amendment:** The Committee voted to oppose the amendment.

- Favored: 3 (Anderson, Ferguson, Weeks)
- Opposed: 11 (Barrett, Braun, Cox, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman)
- Abstained: 0

**Discussion on Original Recommendation:**

CMDCM (Ret.) Harris moved to amend the recommendation by adding the words “and direction” after “strategic oversight.” VADM (Ret.) Braun seconded the motion.

**Proposed Amended 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 be comprised of Service SOF communities, Special Operations Command, and the Joint Staff to provide strategic oversight and direction on current integration plans and challenges, metrics, lessons learned, and best practices. This would enhance recruitment, integration, growth, and retention of women in SOF.*

**Discussion on Amendment:**

Ms. Robin S. Kelleher asked whether the discussion on “execution” and “direction” could be simplified if the recommendation were revised to say, “ensure execution of current integration plans and challenges.” Col (Ret.) Anderson responded her concern is that ensuring at that level equates to executing.

Ms. Leveque supported the “direction” amendment because it provides the action element for the working group without the group having to execute because actual execution would be accomplished by the SOF communities.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum also supported the “direction” amendment but noted it should be “oversight on and direction of.” CMDCM (Ret.) Harris agreed. Ms. Stoneman stated the proposed clarification is a small grammatical change and thus does not require a new amendment.

**Proposed Amended 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 be comprised of 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.*

**Vote on Amendment:** The Committee voted unanimously to adopt the amendment.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Discussion on Amended Recommendation:**

CAPT (Ret.) Barrett requested clarification on recommending a working group as opposed to establishing an office, referring to earlier discussion about the GAO report finding that USD(P&R) had not established an office for oversight. Col (Ret.) Anderson responded the working group would bring SOF communities together for collaboration. She noted the GAO report was focused on sexual harassment and sexual assault in SOF, whereas this recommendation is broader. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks added the working group being led by USD(P&R) would support the GAO recommendation referenced by CAPT (Ret.) Barrett. She also explained the working group would bring together Service SOF communities and USSOCOM along with the Joint Staff. This combination would ensure cross-communication among the Services to identify best practices, challenges, and barriers to enhance and grow the opportunities for women to serve.

**Vote on Amended Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to adopt the amended recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Final 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 be comprised of 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.*

8. *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.*

Col (Ret.) Anderson moved to adopt the recommendation. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris seconded the motion.

**Discussion:**

Dr. Ferguson asked for background on the highlights of the 2022 GAO report recommendations. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks responded there were five recommendations for the DoD and three recommendations directed toward specific Services. She read the verbatim first recommendation: “The Secretary of the Army should revise Army policy for prohibited discrimination—specifically, provisions related to such incidents occurring in joint environments—to ensure that the Army policy aligns with DoD policy.” Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated this recommendation status is open. She read the verbatim second recommendation: “The Secretary of the Navy should ensure that the Commandant of the Marine Corps revises Marine Corps policy for prohibited discrimination and harassment—specifically, provisions related to such incidents occurring in joint environments—to ensure that the Marine Corps policy aligns with DoD policy.” Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated this recommendation status is open. She stated the third recommendation, focused on the Department of the Air Force, has the same language as the previous Marine Corps recommendation, and the status is still open. For the DoD recommendations, she read the verbatim fourth recommendation: “The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, in coordination with the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command; the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness; and the Secretaries of the military departments, establishes a collaborative process for the timely sharing of accurate and complete data on SOCOM personnel, including data on incidents of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault.” Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated this recommendation status is open. She read the verbatim fifth recommendation: “The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness clearly documents and communicates which office has responsibility for the required annual assessments regarding the full integration of women into previously closed positions.” Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated this recommendation status is open. She read the verbatim sixth recommendation: “The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness establishes a consistent process for the use of the required annual assessments regarding the full integration of women into previously closed positions. The process should include a plan of action to guide efforts to address any barriers to women’s service in U.S. Special Operations Forces identified in the assessments.” Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated this recommendation status is open. She read the verbatim seventh recommendation: “The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, in coordination with the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, completes a comprehensive analysis of barriers regarding women in U.S. Special Operations Forces.” Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated this recommendation status is



open. She read the verbatim eight recommendation: “The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, in coordination with the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, upon completion of a comprehensive analysis of barriers regarding women in U.S. Special Operations Forces, develops a plan of action to address any barriers or career impediments to women’s service in U.S. Special Operations Forces identified in the analysis, with goals, objectives, metrics, and milestones.” Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated this recommendation status is open.

**Vote on Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to adopt the recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Final 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.*

### C. Physical Fitness Standards

9. *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.*

Ms. Kelleher moved to adopt the recommendation. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris seconded the motion.

#### **Discussion:**

Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox stated she supports the recommendation as is, noting this topic came up frequently in the focus groups she moderated, and qualitative data is reflected in the Subcommittee’s reasoning statement.

**Vote on Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to adopt the recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Final 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.*

10. *The Secretary of Defense should decouple the physical fitness and body composition (B/C) policies and assessments by reassigning oversight and execution of B/C from command-level personnel 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.*

Ms. Kelleher moved to adopt the recommendation. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris seconded the motion.

**Discussion:**

LTG (Ret.) Mangum expressed his overall support for the recommendation but noted concern about the medical system's capacity to execute the body composition assessment. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks explained her Subcommittee has been examining this topic in its research and with its RFIs and found that medical professionals in the Services currently conduct an annual health assessment, including height and weight, blood pressure, temperature, and vision and auditory checks. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks noted adding body composition would have a minimal time impact, perhaps only a few minutes during this annual assessment, and would be more minimal than current training requirements for command-level personnel to execute the body composition assessments.

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn asked for confirmation that all Services do an annual physical exam on Service members. Ms. Kelleher confirmed they do. She noted there were changes during the Coronavirus (COVID)-19 pandemic, but this information is based on current practices. Ms. Stoneman asked Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn whether "annual" matters for the writing of the recommendation or if the assessment could be implemented in a different way. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn responded she agrees the body composition assessments should be moved to medical professionals because of the differences in ways of measurement across the Services. She further clarified her comment was to confirm that each Service performs an annual physical for every Service member because this is different from past practice. Ms. Stoneman asked whether the recommendation would be less effective if the Services do not conduct an annual physical exam. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks agreed with Ms. Kelleher that the Subcommittee's research indicates there is an annual exam process. However, Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks will review additional information to confirm and clarify following this discussion. She also noted, even if a Service member did not have an annual physical exam, there are other avenues and connection points with medical professionals—for instance, getting your flu shot annually, where a body composition assessment could be added. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris stated every Service member across DoD is currently required to have a physical health assessment to determine their deployable status, bolstering Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks' point there are multiple avenues for incorporating an additional assessment.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz noted her overall support for the recommendation, including the execution of these assessments by medical personnel, but shared concerns about removing oversight from the command level. She asked for more clarification on the meaning of oversight—whether it is the methodology of body composition assessments—because commanders have a substantial role in the body composition program. Responding to HON (Col Ret.) Scholz's question, Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks

highlighted the recommendation says, “policy and assessment,” which was purposeful word selection as opposed to “program,” which was mentioned by HON (Col Ret.) Scholz. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks further elaborated the recommendation is intended to decouple the policies of the body composition and physical fitness assessments and move the body composition assessment to medical professionals, while the overall program remains within a commander’s purview.

CAPT (Ret.) Barrett said this is a very important topic but wanted to know why this should be a recommendation rather than a continuing concern. He also asked whether there have been previous DACOWITS recommendations on this topic. Ms. Kelleher responded DACOWITS has made several recommendations in the past; however, they aligned with the previous recommendation that was voted on. Ms. Kelleher described the recommendation in question as more nuanced.

Ms. Leveque commented another reason for this recommendation is that the Services’ current approaches are disparate. This recommendation would align all Services to the same way of executing body composition assessments, which is especially important because there have been many recent changes. Ms. Leveque also highlighted the Air Force as a best practice because it has already decoupled its physical fitness and body composition assessment and has moved the body composition measurement to medical professionals.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz noted it would be clearer for the recommendation to say, “decouple physical fitness and body composition program policies and assessments by oversight and execution of body composition assessments. ...” HON (Col Ret.) Scholz remains concerned about the lack of specificity about the body composition program. Ms. Leveque clarified the word “policies” was also intended to indicate medical professionals would provide education and resources for Service members who fail their body composition assessment. This would reinforce holistic health with medical professionals featured as the main resource to help Service members get healthy rather than commanders looking at a number. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz responded the word “policy” and the execution of the policy do not bother her; she is concerned about what decision-making power is taken away from the commander.

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks wanted to review the health pillars of Total Force Fitness (TFF) to add to the current discussion. The reasoning statement supporting this recommendation features a graphic of TFF that encompasses social, physical, financial, spiritual, medical and dental preventive care, environmental, nutritional, and psychological. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated contemporary research shows body composition is medically preventive to prevent future disease, which is the basis for moving body composition assessment to medical professionals. She described body fat is an indicator of one’s likelihood of future disease, such as heart disease and high blood pressure, as a long-term aspect of health. The TFF’s physical fitness aspect is focused on strength, agility, aerobic capacity, muscular endurance, and functional mobility, which relates to the readiness and capability of the command level executing the mission today.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz agreed with Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks’ discussion of TFF. She clarified her concern about the recommendation is whether it removes power from the commander when a Service member does not meet body composition standards. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris responded the commander would remain in charge of the program designed to get the Service member back within standards after a failure. This

recommendation would provide additional support and resources from medical professionals to help Service members get back within standards safely and holistically. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris noted commanders would still retain disciplinary power where administrative aspects would shift to medical personnel. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz suggested the recommendation wording could likely be made clearer. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris responded command-level involvement is only the assessment. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn agreed with the concerns HON (Col Ret.) Scholz raised about the wording and precision of the recommendation. She noted policies are not developed at the command level—they are executed. She suggested further clarification of the wording to indicate that medical professionals handle policy development and perform the assessment, which could address this concern. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris responded, currently, oversight and execution of body composition are assigned at the command level; mid-grade personnel are sent to a 2-week school where they learn the tape measure method. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris clarified the recommendation would take oversight and execution away from commands to medical personnel. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated policies are mixed in with assessments and suggested the wording focus on reassigning to medical professionals rather than taking away from command level.

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn moved to amend the recommendation in the following ways: strike “policies and assessments” and replace with “policy development and assessment”; strike “oversight and execution of B/C from command-level personnel” and replace with “policy development and conduct of B/C assessments.” CAPT (Ret.) Barrett seconded the motion.

**Proposed Amended Recommendation:** *The Secretary of Defense should decouple the physical fitness and body composition (B/C) policy development and assessment by reassigning policy development and conduct of B/C assessments to medical professionals. This change 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.*

**Discussion on Amendment:**

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks said the amended language is confusing, wordy, and not clear, and she hopes this amendment will not pass. She suggested it would be better to start from the original recommendation language and remove “from command-level personnel” to address Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn’s point. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks further elaborated the portion of the amended wording she said is unclear, reading “... should decouple the physical fitness and body composition (B/C) policy development and assessment by reassigning policy development and conduct of B/C assessments.”

Ms. Leveque asked Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn whether she is concerned with the word “oversight,” which she replaced with “policy development.” Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn responded she did not like the phrase “command-level” because commanders are not involved in policy development. Related to “oversight and execution,” she said the purpose was to describe policy development and conduct of the body composition assessment itself. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn also stated “oversight and execution” are overused and carry many meanings and thought “policy development” and “conduct of the assessment” would be more appropriate as well as removing “command-level.”

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz emphasized the recommendation wording needs to be clear that the focus is on shifting the conduct of body composition assessments, and not the physical fitness assessment, to medical personnel. She does not feel this language has arrived at maximum clarity and suggested voting on the amendment to revisit the language.

Ms. Leveque suggested taking out the first instance of “policy development and assessment” in the recommendation so it would read “The Secretary of Defense should decouple the physical fitness and body composition (B/C) by reassigning policy development and conduct of B/C assessments to medical professionals.” She noted this wording removes redundancy and improves clarity. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz agreed but would add “programs” so it would read, “The Secretary of Defense should decouple the physical fitness and body composition (B/C) programs by reassigning policy development and conduct of B/C assessments to medical professionals.” Ms. Kelleher cautioned about the use of the word “programs” because the body composition assessment is not the same as the body composition program. Ms. Leveque agreed with Ms. Kelleher’s point on the word “programs,” referencing the earlier conversation about what remains in the command’s purview and noting why the word “policy” was used.

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn asked whether the rest of the sentence, “by reassigning policy development and conduct of ...,” clears up the confusion.

**Vote on Amendment:** The Committee voted unanimously to oppose the amendment.

- Favored: 0
- Opposed: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Abstained: 0

#### **Discussion on Original Recommendation:**

CMDMCM (Ret.) Harris asked Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn whether it would be clearer to remove the word “policies” and include only “assessments,” reading “... physical fitness and body composition (B/C) assessments by reassigning oversight and execution of B/C from command-level personnel to medical professionals.” CMDMCM (Ret.) Harris noted the body composition policies are already written. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn indicated the wording change would be acceptable if the recommendation were not intended to address policy development, but it seems the recommendation is also to transition policy development to medical professionals. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn said she cannot recall who writes the current regulations for body composition, whether it is medical or P&R. CMDMCM (Ret.) Harris responded it is P&R and noted the priority for the recommendation is having the body composition assessment performed by medical personnel. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn asked whether the recommendation is intended to change who develops or writes the policy.

Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon summarized the collective discussion about the purpose of the recommendation, which is to decouple the physical fitness and body composition and reassign the body composition policy development and assessment to medical personnel. Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon stated, “to decouple the physical fitness and body composition and by reassigning the body composition policy development and assessments to medical personnel.” Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon further summarized the goal of the

recommendation is to ensure medical professionals are responsible for the policy development and conduct of the body composition assessment. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz responded Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon's wording was clearer but stated there is a word missing following "physical fitness and body composition" and noted that word cannot be "program" due to the previous discussion.

Ms. Kelleher acknowledged she understands where HON (Col Ret.) Scholz is getting stuck on the wording. Ms. Kelleher also responded to Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon's emphasizing the execution of body composition assessments should be moved to medical personnel because execution by command-level personnel varies and has been detrimental to servicewomen because they have additional locations on the body where they are being taped, leading to inaccuracies.

Ms. Kelleher noted policy development, oversight, and execution of body composition should all be with medical professionals. Further, she noted the discussion seems to be about a language challenge and suggested language such as "physical fitness and body composition assessments should be reassigned to medical professionals to include the policy development, oversight, and execution." LTG (Ret.) Mangum agreed with the direction of Ms. Kelleher's language providing, "decouple physical fitness and body composition assessments by reassigning policy development, oversight, and execution of body composition assessments to medical professionals."

Ms. Leveque moved to amend the recommendation by striking "policies and assessments" and replacing with "program," striking "oversight" and replacing with "policy development," and striking "from command-level personnel." Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks seconded the motion.

**Proposed Amended Recommendation:** *The Secretary of Defense should decouple the physical fitness and body composition (B/C) program by reassigning policy development and execution of B/C 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.*

**Discussion on Amendment:**

LTG (Ret.) Mangum agreed about the amended wording but stated it should be body composition "assessments." Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks responded that is not accurate per the March 2022 publication of DoD Physical Fitness and Body Composition DoD Instruction (DoDI) 1308.03. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks noted the amended wording is strong because it requests DoD decouple these two aspects that are a singular program encapsulated in DoDI 1308.03. She indicated moving body composition policy development and execution to medical professionals will more closely align with TFF where body composition falls under the medical and dental preventive care. LTG (Ret.) Mangum asked whether it was execution of body composition policy, execution, or something else. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks responded it would be inferred back to the previous portion of the sentence "policy development and execution," where the recommendation would be decoupling physical fitness and body composition, and the body composition would be moved to medical professionals.

Ms. Leveque suggested the following wording change for clarity: Strike "of B/C" and revise to "by reassigning body composition policy development and execution to medical

professionals.” Ms. Stoneman confirmed this is a grammatical change that can be made within the current amendment discussion.

**Proposed Amended 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.*

**Vote on Amendment:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the amendment.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Discussion on Amended Recommendation:**

No discussion.

**Vote on Amended Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the amended recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Final 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.*

## **D. Women in Aviation**

*11. 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.*

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks moved to adopt the recommendation. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris seconded the motion.

**Discussion:**

Dr. Ferguson asked whether Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks could share updates about flight suits and what is desired from this recommendation. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated women have been in military aviation since 1976 and in fighter and bomber combat-coded aircraft since 1993. Aviation-specific gear supporting women across platforms remains male-

oriented or unisex and does not fit anthropometric standards of the community supporting aviation, whether male or female aviators. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks described how current gear does not account for women, which decreases human performance capability and decreases women's short- and long-term readiness, including immediate short- and long-term health affects because of ill-fitting gear. The Services, led primarily by the Air Force and Navy, have made improvements in the last 5 years with the female flight duty uniform, including single and double pieces or maternity uniforms. However, Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks noted additional gear outside of those uniforms is well behind in meeting the needs of servicewomen. She cited the Committee's recent RFIs in which the Air Force and Navy are working on urinary relief devices; however, they will not be fielded widely to the fleet or wings until 2024 or 2025, barring any future delays or stagnation. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated it has been more than 30 years since women have been flying in military aircraft. This does not address other gear, Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks described, such as G-suits for high performance aircraft, anti-exposure suits worn during flights over cold water, and chemical ensembles for a combat environment. These items of gear need to have specific focus, dedicated funds, and action to enable women in aviation to serve and execute in their full capacity. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks also highlighted, while this recommendation says "female-specific aviation gear," it will likely apply to and support women in other career fields and Military Occupational Specialties (MOS), such as armor.

**Vote on Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Final 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.*

The Committee took a 15-minute break.

## **E. Pregnancy in the Military**

*12. The Secretary of Defense should direct immediate implementation of the 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 health care for a cadet's or midshipman's period of pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum care, as well as health care coverage for the child.*

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn moved to adopt the recommendation. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett seconded the motion.

**Discussion:**



Ms. Stoneman asked for a summary of the CADET act and its intentions. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated the CADET act was originally proposed in 2020 and 2021 and was incorporated into the fiscal year (FY) 22 NDAA. The CADET act directs that cadets and midshipmen should no longer be required to surrender their parental rights to remain a student at the Military Service Academies. The NDAA ordered implementation by December 27, 2022; however, CADET has not yet been implemented. The DoD commissioned a RAND Corporation study, released in August 2023, to advise on policy implications of the CADET act; previously, cadets and midshipmen were required to surrender their parental rights or disenroll from their Military Service Academy. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn noted the number of affected students is not large; however, some students have been affected over time. She also noted the recent RAND Corporation study recommendations were incorporated into the reasoning statement for this recommendation.

**Vote on Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Final Recommendation:** *The Secretary of Defense should direct immediate implementation of the 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 health care for a cadet's or midshipman's period of pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum care, as well as health care coverage for the child.*

13. *The Secretary of Defense should establish a more robust women's health care 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 DoD, Service, and Defense Health Agency resources, information, and publications, to more effectively aid servicewomen in locating and easily navigating to relevant health care information.*

Dr. Ferguson moved to adopt the recommendation. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox seconded the motion.

#### **Discussion:**

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks asked for clarification about the recommendation establishing a directory on a DoD website given DoD's recent shifts in medical personnel and activities to the Defense Health Agency (DHA). Dr. Ferguson responded DHA has websites with rich, detailed information; however, Military OneSource is a repository for all things related to military life. Currently, Military OneSource's information on aspects such as reproductive care is limited or nonexistent. Dr. Ferguson emphasized the recommendation is not to eliminate DHA's resources but to use Military OneSource as a

directory to link to all relevant DHA and Military Service websites to ensure Service members can easily locate and access this information.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz asked for clarification on ownership of Military OneSource. She asked whether it was owned by a military agency or a contractor. Dr. Ferguson deferred to other Subcommittee members to answer. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn responded Military OneSource is a heavily marketed DoD website built as a one-stop shop for information. Service members and their families are very familiar with it; often, it is a first source of information people seek out. It has many resources, so the genesis of ensuring this information was on Military OneSource is because of its familiarity within the military community. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz stated she asked because she wanted to ensure the recommendation was not connected to a contractor or contractor-run website.

CMDCM (Ret.) Harris asked what is meant by “Service” in the recommendation wording “links to all DoD, Service, and Defense Health Agency. ...” Dr. Ferguson responded it is referring to the Military Services because individual Services sometimes have unique policies or information. Dr. Ferguson stated there is great deal of information on different sources, and this recommendation is focused on building a directory so Service members can access the information more easily because it is in one place. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris clarified “DoD” is intended to indicate all things from DoD, and “Services” refers to each individual Military Service. Dr. Ferguson affirmed stating “DoD” would include DHA, and the “Services” refers to the individual Military Services.

VADM (Ret.) Braun clarified that “DoD” would include Health Affairs at the OSD, which does health policy; “Service” would include, for example, the Navy’s BUMED, which has Navy-specific information; and DHA, which has its overarching website health.mil. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn commented the proliferation and number of different resources scattered across different websites is what drove this recommendation so Service members could start in one place to find these more specific resources.

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks expressed concern about upkeep with the Military OneSource directory pointing to many different websites and resources and asked whether the recommendation should be for DoD, DHA, and the Services to populate one website. VADM (Ret.) Braun responded Military OneSource serves a directory to take Service members and their families to the authoritative sources of information. For instance, DHA is the authoritative source of overall health system information. The Military Services provide more detailed information for Service members in each particular Service. VADM (Ret.) Braun stated Military OneSource currently does not have any information on reproductive health or women’s health. There is limited information on where to go, and the health and wellness link has little information. Dr. Ferguson affirmed the link on health and wellness contains sparse information. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett concurred with the VADM (Ret.) Braun’s points noting earlier RFIs DACOWITS received about website usage rates. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett noted the Services did not have information on usage rates, and he expressed concern that Service members are not finding this type of information. Military OneSource is a place where people start, and making it more robust will help Service members navigate to find the information they need.

Ms. Leveque asked whether the websites linked on Military OneSource would be relatively stable and would then be updated by the authoritative source because she wanted to better understand upkeep. Several Committee members nodded their heads

agreeing that website links would likely be stable and would be kept up by the individual authoritative source.

Dr. Ferguson stated another reason for this recommendation was feedback from DACOWITS' focus groups in which women were frustrated when they found benefits they had not been aware of or were not able to access previously because of a lack of information.

**Vote on Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Final Recommendation:** *The Secretary of Defense should establish a more robust women's health care 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 DoD, Service, and Defense Health Agency resources, information, and publications, to more effectively aid servicewomen in locating and easily navigating to relevant health care information.*

14. *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.*

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn moved to adopt the recommendation. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett seconded the motion.

**Discussion:**

COL (Ret.) Anderson asked for clarification on the recommendation's second point, "prescribe necessary procedures to ensure servicewomen who give birth in civilian facilities receive the necessary maternity CONLV," because she thought medical professionals determined how much CONLV was provided to a woman who had a birth event. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn responded this point was inserted into the recommendation because there have been some examples when servicewomen were referred to civilian providers, and there are confusion and missteps in the process to ensure they get put on CONLV, citing at least one example from a Service member who was denied CONLV. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn noted there is concern that servicewomen who receive care in off-base facilities should be afforded the same benefits and have the same procedures in place for establishing CONLV. This would include ensuring consistent processes and communication between the civilian provider and military system so no Service member is denied leave unnecessarily. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn

noted reading social media posts about Service members being denied leave, partially or fully, due to confusion over the new legislation that was enacted.

Ms. Leveque asked whether there was discussion about prohibiting commanders from denying maternity CONLV rather than detailing the limited circumstances under which they can deny this leave. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn referred to the briefing of RFI 4 from the previous day. The DoDI on parental leave states commanders may not disapprove leave; however, Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn noted they are moving away from that to provide commanders discretion to approve or disapprove maternity CONLV. She also recognized denials are probably a rare and exceptional case, but commanders have the power to approve or disapprove. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated her preference would be to not allow commanders the ability to deny leave; however, providing parameters around denial tightens the scope while still allowing the commander approval process. Ms. Stoneman asked whether the commander denial portion of the recommendation intends to send a signal from the Committee, following the policy evolution based on yesterday's briefing. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn affirmed it is trying to send a signal of concern and express a preference while still providing DoD with options.

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated she supports Ms. Leveque's comments, and the Committee should be bolder in recommending commanders cannot deny maternity CONLV. Maternity CONLV provides a psychological and mental recovery period for mothers who give birth, and therefore denying this type of leave is distinctly different from denying the broader parental leave. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz agreed and said commanders should be prohibited from denying doctor-recommended medical leave because the doctor should decide when the Service member is fit to fight. Ms. Leveque emphasized she views CONLV as a medical decision, whereas parental leave could be a command decision. She noted the recommendation wording currently merges the two, so she would support removing commanders' ability to deny maternity CONLV. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn agreed that is her preference too; however, she noted the military operates in an environment where commanders are responsible for many decisions related to readiness, which is why she worded an alternate in the recommendation itself. She stated she does not have an issue with being bold but also wants to be realistic and honor the commander.

Col (Ret.) Anderson asked whether birth events include nonlive birth events, including miscarriages and stillbirths, since leave and recovery would still be needed. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn says, yes, guidance has been changing and does ensure CONLV for nonlive birth events.

Ms. Leveque moved to amend the recommendation by striking "require the Services, with DHA guidance, to define the limited circumstances under which commanders may disapprove maternity CONLV or, preferably" and adding the words "medical provider" before "recommended" in point 3. Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon seconded the motion.

**Proposed Amended 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) prohibit commanders from denying medical provider recommended maternity CONLV.*

Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox thanked Ms. Leveque for using the words “medical provider” rather than “physician” because military medical personnel could also be advanced practice registered nurses and midwives who are not physicians.

VADM (Ret.) Braun asked Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox or former Judge Advocate Generals (JAGs) on the Committee whether other situations of CONLV, such as breaking a bone, require final approval from the commander. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn responded, in virtually all instances, commanders have the final, ultimate, or only authority to approve CONLV of any kind, liberty, passes, or any forms of absence from the unit. She noted this process is standard across all Services, and removing approval authority for maternity CONLV would be an exception. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks said she does not feel the amendment as written removes authority from commanders; it would prohibit them from denying maternity CONLV leave, but they would still need to approve it. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz noted it would be a change and a marker of change. She said it would be a good step, but it may be a long time until the military is ready for this, but the amendment may be a way to push progress. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks stated, if this changes commander’s authority, it may be a slippery slope that unintentionally sets a precedent. She suggested another course of action is to follow the Army’s practice of requiring an escalation review for maternity CONLV denial. LTG (Ret.) Mangum agreed with Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks that establishing a path of escalation review for maternity CONLV denial, similar to what the Army described for parental leave, may be a better approach. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz agreed but asked whether she was correct that the Air Force stated commanders cannot deny CONLV. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated this was the policy prior to the enactment of new legislation; however, all the Services are rewriting their guidance and seem poised to remove policies stating commanders cannot deny CONLV.

Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox referenced VADM (Ret.) Braun’s earlier question noting the medical provider makes a recommendation for maternity CONLV; however, it is up to the commander to approve the recommendation to ensure Service members are fit for duty. She noted she understands the genesis of the original recommendation language.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum, going back to Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks’ earlier comment, reflected it is inconsistent that maternity CONLV leave recommended by a medical provider does not have the same escalation path as parental leave, which is administrative in nature. He voiced his support for these two forms of leave having the same escalation path for denial. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks wanted to clarify after rereading the Army’s briefing slides from RFI 4: The Army has not published policy on maternity CONLV. The Army advises, if Soldiers are denied maternity CONLV, they should escalate to the next highest level or go to EO. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated it is incumbent upon the Service member to appeal denials of parental leave or maternity CONLV, with the exception of the Army, through established processes, including EO or the IG. Only the Army has an automatic escalation on the parental leave denial. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated the concern is, whenever a Service member has to choose to go through these appeal processes, they risk reprisal from their commanding officer who disapproved it. She noted birth and recovery are a critical time period, and servicewomen should not have to be put in the position to engage in that process while recovering. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn said the escalation should be automatic and immediate.

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks referenced the revision of point 3 in the recommendation to denial that authority is held within the first General officer in a servicewoman’s chain of

command. Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon agreed with this potential shift because she would not feel comfortable having commanders be able to deny for no reason without further review, especially if they were not following the medical provider's recommendation. A next-level General officer review would make her feel more comfortable if there were to be denials. Ms. Leveque also said she could support this type of revision. She asked whether the Subcommittee discussed when it might be reasonable to deny maternity CONLV, especially if a medical provider says a servicewoman is not fit to fight. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated they did not discuss the circumstances for denial. She emphasized she believes this is a rare case, but it has happened, likely due to confusion between maternity CONLV and parental leave. It could be a medical provider who recommended an outrageously long CONLV period or a civilian provider who deviates from what the military normally does. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated one of the Services did have procedures in place if there were a disagreement between the commander and the medical provider that it would default back to the military health group commander to deny.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz noted her support for the original recommendation wording to allow DHA time to consider what limited circumstances are warranted for denial. She suggested it would be best to have more informed guidance on this topic.

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks proposed revisiting the original recommendation wording, which allows time for DHA to develop denial guidance, with updated language adding a point 4 to give denial authority to the first General officer in the chain of command. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz was weary about prescribing denial authority to the first General officer in the chain of command because DHA may come up with something better. She advocated for letting them come up with the guidance by giving them flexibility while showing a preference.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum said more work needed to be done in defining Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks' suggestion because some General officers are commanders too. He noted more work may need to be done to specify General or Flag Officer as opposed to simply commander. He also wondered what the second-order effects could be on subsequent parental leave and whether mandated CONLV would make commanders question the necessity of additional or lengthy parental leave. Ms. Stoneman asked LTG (Ret.) Mangum to clarify the second-order effects of the draft as written or amended. LTG (Ret.) Mangum responded both, noting this issue should be in the background context of the discussion. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz suggested that is a further argument for letting things settle out from the new parental leave legislation. The Services are working on guidance, and things are still getting sorted out. Ms. Stoneman asked whether she was urging for a no vote on the amendment, and HON (Col Ret.) Scholz confirmed.

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated issues related to parental leave are addressed in upcoming recommendations.

CMDCM (Ret.) Harris asked whether recent DoDI amendments discussed in yesterday's RFI 4 briefing related to commander denial. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn responded the DoDI has been extensively rewritten and is currently in a clearance review and approval process. Language that the commander may not disapprove maternity CONLV will be going away in the updated DoDI. Only the Air Force had policies that barred commander denial, and the other Services indicated they prefer allowing commander discretion for approval or denial to remain. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn said she thinks the prohibitions on

commander maternity CONLV denial will be removed and noted the Services had not incorporated this DoDI guidance anyway.

Ms. Leveque noted she understands giving time for the guidance and policy development to roll out and also understands commanders may need to decline CONLV under limited circumstances. She asked whether there was a way to ensure commanders could not deny the minimum length of recovery time to ensure servicewomen have the time they need before they return to work. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated the standard minimum length of time for noncomplicated births is 6 to 8 weeks, which is the time most servicewomen will be authorized for. She noted the length of time could become more complicated if a medical provider issues a second recommendation extending the leave because commanders may want to challenge or question the additional time.

**Vote on Amendment:** The Committee voted unanimously to oppose the amendment.

- Favored: 0
- Opposed: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Abstained: 0

**Discussion on Original Recommendation:**

No discussion.

**Vote on Recommendation:** The Committee voted to approve the recommendation.

- Favored: 13 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 1 (Mangum)
- Abstained: 0

**Final 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.*

15. *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.*

CAPT (Ret.) Barrett moved to adopt the recommendation. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn seconded the motion.

## **Discussion:**

LTG (Ret.) Mangum asked how Family Care Plans (FCPs) are being used other than “as intended for operational readiness” that this recommendation is trying to address. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett responded there have been disparities when FCPs have been used at the unit level as a coercive document rather than as intended to support operational readiness and, ultimately, the Service member. Ms. Stoneman asked CAPT (Ret.) Barrett to elaborate with findings from DACOWITS’ 2023 focus groups on how FCPs are being used in a coercive way. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett noted FCPs came up during the focus groups even though there were no specific questions about them. Servicewomen reported variance in how FCPs are being used by commands; for some, it is used for a TDY process, while for others, it was requested when a child was sick and the servicewoman needed to be absent for a short period of time. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett noted the Committee heard similar sentiments in 2017 when a recommendation was last made on this topic.

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks expressed concern that the language “intended for operational readiness” is not strong enough to address the inappropriate uses of FCPs and noted the language could inadvertently support the negative uses CAPT (Ret.) Barrett described. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett noted the broader context of variance in how FCPs are being used and applied. He cited the Committee’s March 2023 briefing in which the Marine Corps had not separated anyone without a compliant FCP, but the Army had separated 4,000 Soldiers. This recommendation is intended to provide more guidance to reduce variance in how the Services are administering FCPs. Operational readiness remains a core component of the FCPs. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated the purpose of FCPs is to ensure operational readiness for deployments and longer term training or events. However, in many cases, as DACOWITS has heard through the focus groups, FCPs are being used as a weapon against Service members who have a short-term problem, such as their kid being sick. Service members are reporting they are being asked, “Where’s your FCP?” in those instances. The reason for language on operational readiness is to bring that specific aspect back into focus.

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks asked whether the word “consistency” should be added to the recommendation to address the inconsistencies of application and use across the Services. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett noted the recommendation does state “executed consistently across the Services” and “track adequately.” He noted the Air Force, both in 2017 and 2023, did not know how many Airmen had been separated because of FCP issues. The reasoning has a more robust articulation of these issues that expands on the recommendation wording. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks responded she interpreted “executed consistently” as referring to program elements rather than DoD-level guidance and asked whether that was the intended meaning. Ms. Stoneman asked whether Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks was suggesting moving “executed consistently” earlier in the recommendation language. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks concurred, saying the recommendation language may not be hitting what the Subcommittee intended. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn responded, when the recommendation is read along with the accompanying reasoning statement, it becomes clear what the intent is. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett agreed.

CMDCM (Ret.) Harris asked whether the recommendation was based solely on findings from the focus groups. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett responded the recommendation is based on a briefing the Committee received in March and on the focus group findings.



VADM (Ret.) Braun emphasized the disparity CAPT (Ret.) Barrett described earlier with wide variations in separations, which coincides with the focus group findings showing how these policies are not applied consistently across the Services.

Ms. Stoneman noted how this recommendation links with DACOWITS' mission. If FCPs are being used as a cudgel, and their use is disproportionately affecting servicewomen, this recommendation is a marker of this uneven application of the policy and guidance.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz said the recommendation supported the issues identified from the Service briefings, including a need to focus on operational readiness and ensure FCPs are adequately tracked.

**Vote on Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Final 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.*

16. *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.*

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn moved to adopt the recommendation. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett seconded the motion.

**Discussion:**

Ms. Stoneman stated the Committee has worked on this issue repeatedly for many years trying to shape the creation of dignified, professional, and functional uniforms for women who are pregnant. The Committee has learned through recent RFIs that maternity uniforms are inconsistently procured, and the Services are in various stages of updating these uniforms. While some of the recent progress is positive, Ms. Stoneman noted it has taken the Services a long time to get to where they are. The Committee was able to examine current prototypes under development from the Air Force and was encouraged by the progress. Ms. Stoneman reiterated this is an issue the Committee should take the lead on so women have dignified, functional uniforms as warfighters.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum agreed with the recommendation but questioned if the word “modern” is subject to interpretation and assumed “professional” is based on uniform service standards. Ms. Stoneman responded the word “modern” is an attempt to indirectly call out the unmodern appearance of the maternity smock uniforms.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz asked whether affordability is an issue the Committee should also address in the recommendation. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn responded the Subcommittee

examined a variety of issues, including affordability. Affordability was addressed in some recent RFIs; however, the Subcommittee has not adequately studied the issue, and Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn said it could be worthwhile for future examination. She also noted the Services have some pilot programs to address the affordability of maternity uniforms. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz noted she had seen information on the pilot programs and reusing maternity uniforms. She also wondered whether there was a better word for “modern” and suggested “up-to-date.” Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn responded enlisted personnel are generally provided an allowance, while officers are not, noting there is variance. Ms. Stoneman noted the Committee did inquire about the procurement process. While the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) is the primary point of procurement, each Service handles it differently. Ms. Stoneman reported the Committee was unable to examine this issue in a holistic way, and it is worth noting affordability could be addressed in the future.

Col (Ret.) Anderson noted the word “update” may be causing concerns and stated the Marine Corps, Navy, and Army have made significant uniform changes to remove gender differences across uniforms. She said “update” or “modern” makes sense.

**Vote on Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Final 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.*

17. *The Secretary of Defense should direct the appropriate DoD element to closely monitor Service implementation of DTM 23-001, Expansion of the Military Parental Leave Program (MPLP), 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, etc.) and proper implementation of legislative intent.*

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn moved to adopt the recommendation. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett seconded the motion.

### **Discussion:**

Ms. Leveque asked for clarification on what is meant by “closely monitor”; she said the wording is vague and would like to see more action-oriented words to specify what is desired. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn responded the new legislation has spurred a variety of interim guidance. The recommendation wording is intended for DoD to review and monitor the development of these guidelines to ensure consistency in key elements across the Services—for instance, denial of single-block or incremental leave, whether there is an automatic appeal mechanism, and others. Focus group participants, especially servicemen, expressed concern they are already feeling pressure to not use the full length of parental leave available to them. They also feared career repercussions if they were to

use the full length of leave; some cited ways in which their leadership has blatantly stated this. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn noted this moment in time is a formative period because the policy is so new. She agreed there could be another word, maybe “oversee” or “watch,” but the recommendation is prescribing DoD closely monitor how this policy is implemented across the Services. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz suggested “actively track the implementation” or “actively monitor” to give more strength to the action.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum asked whether the recommendation should specify the “appropriate DoD element” since DACOWITS recommendations are normally more specific. He asked whether this was the responsibility of USD(P&R) and, if so, whether that should be specified. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn responded, if there is a definitive answer, it can be adjusted, but the Subcommittee members were not exactly sure who has ultimate responsibility within the DoD. Ms. Stoneman conferred with DACOWITS executive staff and invited Committee members to continue the discussion on the intent or verbiage of the recommendation.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz asked whether “closely monitor” is sufficient. Ms. Stoneman made a point of order that the owner of the parental leave program is USD(P&R) and requested the Committee finish discussing the wording before proposing an amendment. Ms. Leveque stated she does not feel strongly about the wording “closely monitor” or substituting for more active wording. She is concerned “tracking” may be too active of a word to use that goes beyond what the Subcommittee intended for the recommendation. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz noted “closely monitoring” is sufficient.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum moved to amend the recommendation to strike “appropriate DoD element” and replace with “Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.” CAPT (Ret.) Barrett seconded the motion.

**Proposed Amended 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 (MPLP), 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, etc.) and proper implementation of legislative intent.*

**Discussion on Amendment:**

No discussion.

**Vote on Amendment:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the amendment.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Discussion on Amended Recommendation:**

No discussion.

**Vote on Amended Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the amended recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Final 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 (MPLP), 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, etc.) and proper implementation of legislative intent.*

18. *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 assure reasonableness of disapproval actions and consistency of policy application across the Military Services.*

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn moved to adopt the recommendation. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett seconded the motion.

**Discussion:**

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated this recommendation is aimed at addressing disapproval authority for parental leave specifically. Services other than the Army allow commanders to deny parental leave. The Army issued guidance stating only a General officer can disapprove; however, confusion remains about whether that guidance applies to single-block and incremental leave alike. In the other Services, if Service members receive a denial, they can appeal through existing EO or IG channels, but there is no automatic appeal process like in the Army. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated focus group participants and information from elsewhere indicate Service members face a lot of pressure not to take the full leave. There is also pressure on choosing between single-block and incremental leave. Service members feel these decisions will impact their careers. The Subcommittee is concerned that no Service member will risk the displeasure of their commander by appealing a denial for the partial or full leave. Thus, she stated it feels important to insert this protection by providing automatic appeal and that only the first O-6 in the chain of command can disapprove the leave requests.

**Vote on Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0

- Abstained: 0

**Final 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 assure reasonableness of disapproval actions and consistency of policy application across the Military Services.*

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

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn moved to adopt the recommendation. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett seconded the motion.

**Discussion:**

CMDCM (Ret.) Harris asked whether the “appropriate DoD element” refers to the Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) or IG. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated this recommendation is not to create an entirely new survey but is intended to have questions on this topic incorporated into existing, ongoing surveys on working conditions. A number of existing DoD surveys could be an option, and it would not have to be the same survey; it could be the RAND Corporation survey, the DEOCS, or surveys from USD(P&R). CMDCM (Ret.) Harris asked whether the recommendation would leave it up to the Secretary of Defense to decide which element. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn responded it would be at the Secretary of Defense’s discretion whether the element would be incorporated in various surveys taken by different groups or direct it to one specific survey. She said it is important to gather this information and wanted to leave it up to the Secretary of Defense to decide who would execute it and how it would be executed. CMDCM (Ret.) Harris likes the recommendation but wondered how the DoD would pick the survey sources.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz asked whether the recommendation should be directed toward the Military Services to get into Service-specific survey avenues. Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon stated there are surveys from many different entities, including the Office of People Analytics (OPA), the Defense Equal Opportunity Management (DEOMI), and commands. She also noted the survey procedures and approval processes, so it may be best to leave the recommendation wording broad and flexible so it can be used in different ways depending on where DoD wants to examine this issue. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett responded there are many Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) surveys, and the intent was to keep the recommendation broad so there is flexibility. He stated the Status of Forces survey for the active and reserve components could be a place for the addition of these questions. CAPT (Ret.) Barrett reiterated the Secretary of Defense might be the best to judge which survey.

Ms. Stoneman asked whether existing survey possibilities for this recommendation are outlined in the reasoning statement. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn responded the reasoning does not cover that; it focuses on why it would be helpful to add these survey questions to track the implementation of this policy over time. Ms. Stoneman stated it might be

helpful to add potential options to the reasoning to give context. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn concurred and said it could be added to the reasoning.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum expressed concern about accountability and follow-up on the recommendation if a specific office is named. He suggested revising the language to address USD(P&R) monitoring surveys and directing the surveys to include language on the equitable use of parental leave entitlements. Ms. Stoneman asked whether he was making a motion. LTG (Ret.) Mangum said this was for discussion. He referenced CMDCM (Ret.) Harris' earlier point that the recommendation is to include these items in various surveys, but it does not specify who will monitor and ensure the inclusion.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz stated it would be beneficial to identify who is responsible for DoD surveys if possible. Ms. Jessica Myers, DACOWITS Executive Staff, made a point of order that USD(P&R) owns OPA and DMDC, which execute DoD surveys.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum stated leave policies are the responsibility of USD(P&R). CMDCM (Ret.) Harris recommended specifying USD(P&R) to ensure clear responsibility within DoD.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum moved to amend the recommendation to strike "appropriate DoD element" and replace with "Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness." CAPT (Ret.) Barrett seconded the motion.

**Proposed Amended 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 commands and were not unreasonably denied or discouraged from taking their full parental leave entitlements.*

**Discussion on Amendment:**

No discussion.

**Vote on Amendment:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the amendment.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Discussion on Amended Recommendation:**

No discussion.

**Vote on Amended Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the amended recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Final 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 commands and were not unreasonably denied or discouraged from taking their full parental leave entitlements.*

20. *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 health care needs (e.g., fertility, assisted reproductive technology, pregnancy, postpartum depression, etc.), which could adversely impact their well-being, readiness, and retention.*

Dr. Ferguson moved to adopt the recommendation. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox seconded the motion.

**Discussion:**

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks expressed concern with limiting the examples to those in the parentheses and proposed removing the word “postpartum” from “postpartum depression” because a lesser-known form of pregnancy-related depression is antepartum depression. Dr. Ferguson agreed and stated the reasoning statement includes antepartum depression.

Ms. Stoneman asked whether Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks wanted to only strike “postpartum” or add “antepartum.” Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks responded it is more holistic to leave it as “depression” given servicewomen who have challenges conceiving or are going through infertility treatments can have depression associated with their reproductive healthcare.

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks moved to amend the recommendation to strike “postpartum.” CMDCM (Ret.) Harris seconded the motion.

**Proposed Amended 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 health care needs (e.g., fertility, assisted reproductive technology, pregnancy, depression, etc.), which could adversely impact their well-being, readiness, and retention.*

**Discussion on Amended Recommendation:**

Dr. Ferguson clarified a wider variety of conditions are discussed in the reasoning statement.

**Vote on Amendment:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the amendment.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Discussion on Amended Recommendation:**

No discussion.

**Vote on Amended Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the amended recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Final 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 health care needs (e.g., fertility, assisted reproductive technology, pregnancy, depression, etc.), which could adversely impact their well-being, readiness, and retention.*

## F. Gender Discrimination

21. *The Secretary of Defense should direct an update of DoD policies to: (1) distinguish between sexual harassment and gender-based discriminatory harassment, (2) define how gender-based, non-sexual discriminatory harassment can occur, and (3) clarify reporting mechanisms, so that Service members can better comprehend, identify, and report discriminatory behavior.*

Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox moved to adopt the recommendation. Dr. Ferguson seconded the motion.

### Discussion:

Ms. Leveque asked for clarification on point 3 and the intended meaning of “clarify.” She asked whether the current reporting mechanisms are accurate but not clear in the instruction or if this is recommending changes to the reporting mechanisms. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox responded it is a combination of both. She noted the reporting mechanisms across Services are different and lack clarity about reporting and resources for gender-based discriminatory harassment. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox highlighted the Coast Guard as a best practice because it has one policy defining all forms of harassment, and it has templates for reporting mechanisms and disciplining members who engage in these behaviors. The Coast Guard’s resources, information, and hotline number are all in one place.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum noted the recommendation needed to be directed to the responsible office within DoD, which he thinks is USD(P&R). Ms. Stoneman confirmed via DACOWITS Executive Staff USD(P&R) would be responsible for this harassment policies, resources, and reporting.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz wanted to discuss additional wording updates before an amendment. She asked whether the word “avoid” should be added to point 3 to emphasize better prevention education. She recommended the wording could read “Service members can better comprehend, identify, report, and avoid discriminatory behavior.” Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox clarified HON (Col Ret.) Scholz wanted to keep the descriptors already in point 3 but add the word “avoid.” HON (Col Ret.) Scholz responded she wanted to discuss the idea or whether there is a better way to include a prevention focus. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox noted the reasoning statement addresses updating education and training, so “avoidance” is implicitly, but not explicitly, addressed. Ms. Stoneman shared her concern the word “avoid” puts the onus on the Service members because the wording in point 3 focuses on Service members and does not take



responsibility for the offender's actions. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz clarified she was not talking about being an offender. Ms. Stoneman suggested wording alterations to point 3 are attached to Service members, "... so that Service members. ...". HON (Col Ret.) Scholz stated point 3 is tied to reporting mechanisms; she emphasized wanting Service members to know what behavior they should not be doing. HON (Col Ret.) asked Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox whether point 3 is covered in the reasoning statement and whether she thinks it is necessary to include in the recommendation. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox affirmed point 3 is covered in the reasoning and suggested it was best to go with the recommendation wording as written to keep it clear.

Ms. Leveque asked for further clarification on point 3 and the word "clarify"; she wondered whether it would be better to include "update and clarify" to ensure the right reporting mechanisms are in place. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox asked whether Ms. Leveque was proposing "update and clarify" or just "update" be added to the recommendation. Ms. Leveque responded "update and clarify" because "clarify" alone does not convey a change to reporting mechanisms. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox responded the word "update" is contained within the first sentence, which covers it all in the beginning of the recommendation wording. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated "clarify" was intended to point out there are a number of reporting systems only classified or marketed for sexual harassment, so someone who has suffered from gender discrimination may not realize they can report unless they read into the details. Ms. Leveque stated that answered her question; she thought there was a desire to update reporting mechanisms rather than clarify they include nonsexual gender discrimination. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox agreed with Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn that the goal is so a Service member knows how and where to report this type of behavior.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum asked whether USD(P&R) was confirmed as the responsible office. Ms. Stoneman replied affirmatively.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum moved to amend the recommendation to add "the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to" following the word "direct" and strike the word "an" and "of" in that sentence. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox seconded the motion.

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

**Discussion on Amendment:**

No discussion.

**Vote on Amendment:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the amendment.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

### **Discussion on Amended Recommendation:**

No discussion.

**Vote on Amended Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the amended recommendation.

- Favored: 14 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Solomon, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

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

22. *The Secretary of Defense should direct the Marine Corps to establish a formally recognized women's initiative team (WIT)-like structure and, additionally, ensure all the Services' WITs have senior leadership support in order to identify and remediate unique challenges and cultural barriers faced by servicewomen.*

Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox moved to adopt the recommendation. Dr. Ferguson seconded the motion.

### **Discussion:**

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks expressed concern about recommending the Marine Corps implement a formal WIT when the Air Force WIT is not a formally recognized group. She also emphasized the Air Force WIT is a self-initiated group, governed by a volunteer structure, and is part of the formally recognized DAF Barrier Analysis Working Group (BAWG). Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks struggles with supporting the recommendation as is because it targets one Service and has gaps in the reasoning statement. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox responded the other Services have WIT-like mechanisms to address issues and noted the Air Force has senior champions at a high level. The recommendation originally started to mimic the Air Force's WIT, but other Services, such as the Army and the National Guard, have recently started WITs. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox stated the recommendation is directed at the Marine Corps because it has stated it does not have a WIT and does not intend to start one because the Marine Corps looks to resolve retention barriers for both women and men. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox understands Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks' point about formal recognition if the Air Force WIT is not formally recognized.

Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon noted the Committee has focused several recommendations on the Marine Corps and has reservations about calling it out specifically, especially if the Air Force WIT is not a formal structure. She suggested it may be best to give the other Services' WITs time to establish themselves, which may naturally put more pressure on the Marine Corps to start one. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz agreed with Brig Gen (Ret.) Solomon and said the Air Force WIT has been effective because it was a grassroots effort. She said forcing the establishment of WITs may not be productive and agreed it would be better to wait to see how these efforts evolve. If WITs are working and

identified as a best practice, it may encourage the Marine Corps to start one. The Services' WITs are very different, so it could be helpful to observe over time and identify what is working best. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox responded only 9 percent of the Marine Corps are women. Based on DACOWITS' recent focus groups, many women in the Marine Corps shared they are the only woman in their chain of command and found support during the focus groups being with other women. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox stated all the Services are doing something in this area except for the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps has an informal WIT, but it is not sanctioned by the institution. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox stressed it is important to watch out for the Service with the fewest number of women.

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks noted she does not disagree with the intention of this recommendation from the Subcommittee. However, she said that important differences in how the WITs have been formed should not be ignored. She stated the recommendation could be for the Secretary of Defense to establish BAWGs to identify and solve barriers to women's service, recruitment, and retention. The Air Force BAWG, in which the WIT is part of, has no accountability, no authority, no funding, and no personnel. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks also stated the BAWG's recent senior champion retired, and it is unclear who can carry it forward. She said recommending the Services establish BAWGs for women may be preferable and requested Committee discussion on this point. Col (Ret.) Anderson suggested the recommendation may need to be pulled and establish this as a continuing concern to gather more information and watch how newly formed WITs emerge. VADM (Ret.) Braun agreed with Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks' original point about incongruity in the recommendation with the Air Force WIT not being formally recognized. She stated a variety of WITs are forming, and although the Marine Corps did not say it has ongoing working groups in its RFI response, it does. VADM (Ret.) Braun suggested the recommendation needs to be reworked.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum noted the Committee addressed the WISR in the USSOCOM recommendation and asked whether the recommendation should reenergize the WISR to capitalize on organizational feedback, both formal and informal. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks responded perhaps the recommendation should be that the Secretary of Defense should direct USD(P&R) to study WIT structures across the Military Services. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz chimed in on Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks' idea, noting USD(P&R) should study and identify the best practices from WITs. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks elaborated that USD(P&R) should study the self-generated differences in how the Services are approaching this to establish better policy and guidance to address ongoing issues related to women's service.

Ms. Myers, DACOWITS Executive Staff, made a point of order to note there is an internal working group in USD(P&R), and some of the WITs participate in it. Dr. Ferguson asked what the working group studies and what is in its charter. Ms. Myers responded the working group does not have a charter and stated she is not a subject matter expert on the group.

Col (Ret.) Anderson asked whether Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks was suggesting the WISR be reenergized. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks responded that was LTG (Ret.) Mangum's suggestion.

Ms. Leveque asked whether the concern is not having a WIT team or not being able to identify barriers. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn clarified the genesis of the recommendation was to recommend every Service have some group without prescribing the structure. This

was to ensure each Service has some mechanism by which it collects information and can identify barriers to women's service and careers. All the Services, with the exception of the Marine Corps, have something, but it may look different. The DAF WIT is not funded, but it is recognized by senior leadership and the Service; the WIT has initiated many changes even though it is not part of the formal structure.

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks warned the DAF WIT has presented many of its wins, but this does not show its struggle. She provided examples that the taskers generated by the DAF WIT were not included in the BAWG, and she noted the WIT's inability to build an offsite and receive funding. While current leaders support the DAF WIT's efforts, support is not guaranteed to continue. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks suggested there is a better way to word the recommendation to address this in a holistic manner across the Services without singling out the Marine Corps.

Ms. Stoneman made a point of order to have Ms. Myers provide an update on the DoD working group she mentioned earlier. Ms. Myers referenced a previous Committee briefing from June 2022 and read the following from the briefing slides: "The Women in Service Working Group (WIS WG) was established in May 2021 and serves as the primary advisory group for the DoD Medical and Personnel Executive Steering Committee (MEDPERS) and the USD(P&R) on medical and personnel policy related to women in Service. WIS WG is composed of representatives from both medical and personnel organizations across DoD and the Services. The WIS WG was created to align the medical and personnel communities to develop, discuss, and provide recommendations upon issues pertaining to Service women."

Ms. Stoneman noted this recommendation has evolved based on the Subcommittee's research and information gathering, highlighting the formal colloquial recognition as opposed to establishing a formal office. She asked whether the Subcommittee would be open to reverting to a previous draft recommendation that might address some of the feedback from Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox wondered whether it would be best to continue to study this topic next year. Ms. Stoneman replied there are no guarantees what the 2024 study topics will be because they are selected by the Secretary of Defense. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox affirmed the topic could be lost with postponing a recommendation. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn suggested the recommendation focus on a mechanism, group, or structure for each Service dedicated to cultural and service barriers for women's career progression.

Ms. Stoneman stated the Committee could take a short recess to allow the Subcommittee time to draft new recommendation language to propose to the group. Ms. Stoneman asked for additional discussion before a brief recess.

LTG (Ret.) Mangum stated WIT is not a study topic for this year, but it could fit under a study topic for next year. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn stated Well-Being and Treatment's study topics were gender discrimination and pregnancy and career progression. WITs were one of the remedies to help address these issues that has shown promise. VADM (Ret.) Braun noted originally this recommendation was to celebrate the DAF WIT's success and to use it as a model for other Services. The DAF WIT has aided in removing barriers in all the areas addressed by DACOWITS: well-being and treatment, employment and integration, and recruitment and retention.

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks proposed adjusting the recommendation language to recommending the Secretary of Defense should direct the Services, specifically the Marine Corps, to establish a women's barrier analysis or initiative working group to better enable recruitment and retention of women in the military. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz noted some Services already have BAWGs. She suggested the Committee should give the Services time for their current work and activities. HON (Col Ret.) Scholz asked whether the Committee can highlight the DAF WIT as a best practice in its report. She further cautioned stepping over the work the Services are doing right now.

Ms. Leveque takes issue with the word "working group," noting the power of the DAF WIT was that it was not an established working group; it was established as a grassroots effort where everyone's voices were heard. Ms. Leveque suggested recommending these groups have an established senior championship to ensure the grassroots voices are heard.

VADM (Ret.) Braun stated she is opposed to calling out the Marine Corps in the recommendation because there is a lack of clarity on unofficial activities they have not discussed.

Ms. Stoneman reiterated Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox's earlier point, about anecdotal evidence from focus groups that women in the Marine Corps felt they lacked female-specific Service connections. Ms. Stoneman reiterated her agreement with other points raised in the discussion and stated the focus on the Marine Corps in the recommendation was not to call out the Service but to encourage it to employ effective practices from the other Services.

Ms. Stoneman announced a 10-minute recess for the Subcommittee to gather separately and adjust the recommendation language.

During the recess, Brig Gen (Ret). Solomon departed the meeting.

CAPT (Ret.) Barrett moved to amend the recommendation to strike the entirety of the previous wording and replace it with "The Secretary of Defense should direct the Services to foster organic women's barrier analysis teams with senior leadership support in order to identify and remediate unique challenges faced by servicewomen." Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox seconded the motion.

**Proposed Amended Recommendation:** *The Secretary of Defense should direct the Services to foster organic women's barrier analysis teams with senior leadership support in order to identify and remediate unique challenges faced by servicewomen.*

**Discussion on Amendment:**

LTG (Ret.) Mangum suggested the recommendation wording is inconsistent because, if the Secretary of Defense "directs" the groups to be created, they are not "organic." Ms. Stoneman asked LTG (Ret.) Mangum if another word would resolve the issue. LTG (Ret.) Mangum was unsure and wondered whether this recommendation is ready for this year. Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn suggested the word "encourage" instead of "direct" could indicate support for these organic groups. LTG (Ret.) Mangum said both "direct" and "encourage" is incongruent with "organic" teams. He also noted this could be related to any future study topic so it could be something the Committee returns to in the future. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks noted "encourage" could be as simple as the Service chiefs passing along the stories of wins from entities like the DAF WIT. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks indicated there is not a disconnect between "encourage" and "organic" because it can be

accomplished through examples. She noted there is an important cultural communication aspect if this issue were to be raised by the Secretary of Defense or Deputy Secretary of Defense. LTG (Ret.) Mangum continued to express concern about the word “organic.” He pointed out that the Army’s WIT is not organic; it is appointed through an application process. Each of the Services is tackling this in a different way. LTG (Ret.) Mangum does not think the Committee should prescribe them to be organic even though some of them have arisen organically. Ms. Leveque agreed the Services are taking different approaches with some organic and some formalized. She suggested adding language that the Secretary of Defense should encourage these teams, whether organic or formalized, to bring to senior leadership’s attention. Ms. Leveque noted this is important to highlight with a recommendation this year because this is a different avenue that has made progress.

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks suggested language, “The Secretary of Defense should encourage the Services to foster women’s barrier analysis or initiative teams” with additional information about specifics in the reasoning statement. Ms. Kelleher agreed with Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks and noted you cannot direct organic groups to be as good as if they were truly organic. She stated the DAF WIT has proven these types of teams are necessary and they work. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox agreed with the comments and asked whether language could be changed now. Ms. Stoneman noted the Committee needs to vote on the current amendment first.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz agreed the word “organic” is an issue for her too. She suggested highlighting the DAF WIT as a best practice or encouraging further study to identify the best practices. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox highlighted the DAF WIT is covered in the reasoning statement, and the Subcommittee has gone back and forth about whether to include it in the recommendation. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox suggested a vote on the amendment and then the Committee could continue working on the recommendation language.

**Vote on Amendment:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the amendment.

- Favored: 13 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Discussion on Amended Recommendation:**

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks suggested “organic” or “formalized” should be saved for the reasoning rather than the recommendation language. She encouraged further discussion on what language is needed in the recommendation. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox proposed “the Secretary of Defense should encourage the Services to foster organic or formalized women’s barrier analysis/initiative teams with senior leadership support in order to identify and remediate unique challenges faced by servicewomen” while highlighting these points of discussion in the reasoning. VADM (Ret.) Braun noted the wording discussed is too prescriptive, especially when at least one Service has a WIT that is not organic. She suggested removing the word “organic” so it focuses on fostering these barrier analysis and women’s initiative teams.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz is concerned the recommendation is recommending something many of the Services are already doing. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks responded it would be easy for those Services to report to the Secretary of Defense they are already doing it.

Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks moved to amend the amended recommendation to strike the word “direct” and replace with “encourage,” strike the word “organic,” and add “/initiative” following the word “analysis.” CAPT (Ret.) Barrett seconded the motion.

**Proposed Amended Recommendation:** *The Secretary of Defense should encourage the Services to foster women’s barrier analysis/initiative teams with senior leadership support in order to identify and remediate unique challenges faced by servicewomen.*

**Discussion on Amendment:**

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz asked for clarification on what actions are expected with the word “encourage.”

VADM (Ret.) Braun stated a major purpose of the recommendation is senior leader support. Some Services already have these types of teams or initiatives but still need senior leadership support.

Dr. Ferguson remarked “encourage” could be interpreted as a wide variety of things, including storytelling and publicizing successes; the recommendation leaves it open to allow for flexibility.

Brig Gen (Ret.) Sanborn said the purpose is to affirm ongoing efforts, continue to encourage movement in the right direction, demonstrate the Committee feels these teams are important, and provide better leadership support.

Ms. Leveque asked whether “senior leadership support” should be moved up in the recommendation wording to emphasize its importance so it reads “The Secretary of Defense should encourage the Services to provide senior leadership support and foster women’s barrier analysis/initiative teams. ...”

LTG (Ret.) Mangum asked how one would know whether the Secretary of Defense has encouraged and how one would know whether the Services have fostered. He wanted more clarity on the elements of “foster” and “encourage.” Ms. Leveque suggested “the Secretary of Defense should direct senior leadership support in fostering ...” because this would direct someone to ensure it is happening. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox stated the word “direct” was taken out because you cannot direct “organic”; she supported including direct because it has more weight. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks deferred to Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox’s opinion on the wording.

Ms. Kelleher asked whether the recommendation should include an outcome from these teams, such as an annual report or identification of unique challenges. Ms. Stoneman made a point of order to ask Ms. Myers if the WIS WG mentioned earlier tracks this kind of progress. Ms. Myers responded she did not know. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks cautioned the WIS WG seemed primarily focused on medical issues, and this recommendation addresses broader issues. In response to Ms. Kelleher’s comment, Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks expressed concern about a misalignment between words like “encourage” and “foster” if the Committee were to recommend the production of reports. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks said a strength in the recommendation is to allow Services to tackle these issues differently. She noted the reasoning could address how to foster and encourage these efforts with senior leadership support by highlighting what is currently being done.

Dr. Ferguson noted the work of these teams is emerging and is not at the stage to produce results. Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Cox agreed and stated this topic intersects with the work of all three DACOWITS Subcommittees. She said it is important to highlight what the Services are doing now, highlight the accomplishments of the DAF WIT as a best practice, and be open to new best practices that may develop in the future.

HON (Col Ret.) Scholz agreed with Ms. Leveque that “senior leadership support” should be moved up in the recommendation wording. Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks asked whether an amendment would be required to make that change. Ms. Stoneman stated those words could be moved around within this amendment discussion.

**Proposed Amended Recommendation:** *The Secretary of Defense should encourage the Services’ senior leadership support to foster women’s barrier analysis/initiative teams to identify and remediate unique challenges faced by servicewomen.*

Ms. Leveque asked whether the Committee should keep the word “encourage” or go back to “direct.” Col (Ret.) Anderson responded she is more comfortable with “encourage” because the Services are doing this differently and taking baby steps toward it. If needed, the Committee could revisit the recommendation in future years to make it stronger. Ms. Stoneman encouraged the Committee to vote on the recommendation amendment before proposing additional revisions.

**Vote on Amendment:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the amendment.

- Favored: 13 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Discussion on Amended Recommendation:**

Ms. Leveque moved to amend the amended recommendation by striking the word “encourage” and replacing with “direct.” Dr. (Col Ret.) Weeks seconded the motion.

**Proposed Amended Recommendation:** *The Secretary of Defense should direct the Services’ senior leadership support to foster women’s barrier analysis/initiative teams to identify and remediate unique challenges faced by servicewomen.*

**Discussion on Amendment:**

CMDCM (Ret.) Harris supported the revision to “direct” because it strengthens the recommendation.

**Vote on Amendment:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the amendment.

- Favored: 13 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

**Discussion on Amended Recommendation:**

No discussion.



**Vote on Amended Recommendation:** The Committee voted unanimously to approve the amended recommendation.

- Favored: 13 (Anderson, Barrett, Braun, Cox, Ferguson, Harris, Kelleher, Leveque, Mangum, Sanborn, Scholz, Stoneman, Weeks)
- Opposed: 0
- Abstained: 0

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

The voting session concluded.

### **Final Remarks**

LTC Frazier, DACOWITS Military Director and DFO, stated the next meeting would be held December 5-6, 2023, at the AUSA Conference Center in Arlington, Virginia. Details will be published in the Federal Register. She thanked attendees and concluded the public portion of the meeting.

**The meeting was adjourned.**

## Summary of Written Responses Received for September 2023 QBM

RFI 1	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RECRUITMENT INITIATIVES TO INCREASE WOMEN’S PROPENSITY TO SERVE</b></p> <p>In accordance with DACOWITS’ Terms of Reference, the Recruitment and Retention (R&amp;R) Subcommittee will assess the scale and effectiveness of the Military Services’ recruitment programs with the goal of providing actionable recommendations on how to best increase adolescent women’s propensity to serve. In addition, the R&amp;R Subcommittee will examine existing policies and procedures to determine whether current practices inhibit the recruitment of women, specifically assessing the inclusivity of existing marketing strategies; current recruitment goals for women; improvements in the representation of female recruiters; virtual recruiting capabilities; and potential innovative best practices gleaned from the establishment of the Space Force.</p>	
<p>The Committee remains concerned about the inability of the Military Services to meet their annual recruiting goals. In March 2023, via RFI 4, the Committee received a briefing from the Army on its innovative Future Soldier Preparatory Course (FSPC). Since the time of that Army briefing, the Navy has created a similar Future Sailor Preparatory Course.</p> <p>The Committee requests a <b>written response</b> from the <b>Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and the Department of the Air Force</b> on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <b>Army:</b> For the Academic Skills Development Program, provide the number of participants, graduation rates, discharge rates, and average Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) increase rate by gender.</li> <li>b. <b>Army &amp; Navy:</b> For the fitness and nutrition course, provide the number of participants, graduation rates, and average weekly body fat loss (e.g., percentage) by gender.</li> <li>c. <b>Navy:</b> What caused women to join later iterations of the program vice beginning the preparatory course alongside their male peers?</li> <li>d. <b>Army &amp; Navy:</b> Identify any other challenges or successes with implementation of these programs, which have not already been provided.</li> <li>e. <b>Army &amp; Navy:</b> Provide information on how graduates are performing in Basic Training post-preparatory course by gender.</li> <li>f. <b>Marine Corps &amp; Air Force:</b> Does your Service plan to implement a similar preparatory course? If so, which portions and when?</li> </ol>	
Organization	Description
Army	The Army provided the Committee with a response.
Navy	The Navy provided the Committee with a response.
Marine Corps	The Marine Corps provided the Committee with a response.
Department of the Air Force	The Department of the Air Force provided the Committee with a response.

RFI 2

**RETENTION INITIATIVES FOR SERVICEWOMEN**

In accordance with DACOWITS’ Terms of Reference, the R&R Subcommittee will identify barriers to female retention and present findings and actionable recommendations to improve the overall retention of women. In addition, the R&R Subcommittee will utilize the Military Services’ retention and exit survey data to identify barriers and/or lessons learned to identify ways to improve servicewomen’s retention.

In June 2022, the Committee received a briefing from the Department of the Air Force (DAF) Women’s Initiatives Team (WIT). In September 2022, via RFI 5, the Committee asked the Military Services to provide a status update on their potential Women’s Initiatives Team or working group like the DAF WIT. At the time, the Army was in the process of establishing a WIT and the Navy was in the process of developing one.

The Committee requests a **written response** update from the **Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and National Guard** on whether your Service has implemented a WIT focused on identifying and resolving barriers that impact the retention of servicewomen? If so, provide additional details about your Service’s WIT (e.g., policies, directives, charter, oversight authority, streamlined access to senior level decision-makers, etc.). If not, explain why a WIT has not or will not be founded.

Organization	Description
Army	The Army provided the Committee with a response.
Navy	The Navy provided the Committee with a response.
Marine Corps	The Marine Corps provided the Committee with a response.
Coast Guard	The Coast Guard provided the Committee with a response.
National Guard	The National Guard provided the Committee with a response.

RFI 3

**GENDER INTEGRATION**

In accordance with DACOWITS’ Terms of Reference, the Employment and Integration (E&I) Subcommittee will examine current efforts to fully integrate women into previously closed combat positions, determine whether barriers are inhibiting full integration, and identify actionable solutions. In addition, the E&I Subcommittee examined recent modifications to women’s uniforms, as well as combat gear and equipment, to identify solutions, as required.

In December 2015, the Secretary of Defense (SecDef) opened all remaining occupations and positions to women with no exceptions. As a result, the Defense Department opened approximately 213,600 closed positions and 52 closed military occupational specialties to women for the first time. Afterwards, the SecDef directed the Secretaries of the Military Departments and Chiefs of the Military Services to provide their final, detailed Gender Integration Implementation Plans no later than January 1, 2016. Once approved, the Military Services were tasked with executing their plans by April 1, 2016. In September 2022, via RFIs 6-7, the Military Services provided the Committee an update on adjustments made to the original 2016 Gender Integration Implementation Plans, current or future initiatives being undertaken to increase women in Special Operations Forces (SOF), and the data on

women in SOF. In December 2022, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a report titled, “*Women in Special Operations*” (GAO-23-105168), which outlined improvements to policy, data, and assessments needed to understand and address career barriers for women in SOF. GAO made a total of 8 recommendations, of which DoD concurred, however, to date none have been implemented.

The Committee requests an updated **written response** from the **Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Special Operations Command (SOCOM)**, in coordination with the **Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD(SO/LIC))**, to address the integration of women into the previously closed military occupational specialties within the associated-Service SOF (outlined in the “Positions to be Opened” fact sheet). Provide the following data for officer and enlisted career fields opened in 2016, utilizing the fact sheet provided:

- a. Number of women that entered the training pipeline (by fiscal year (FY) beginning in 2016 through current 2023 (e.g., 8 years)).
- b. Number of women that were removed from the training pipeline for failure to meet standards, along with denominator of total women who entered (should match bullet a above) (by FY beginning in 2016 through current 2023; 8 years).
- c. Number of women who voluntarily left the training pipeline (self-induced elimination (SIE)), along with denominator of total women who entered (should match bullet a above) (by FY beginning in 2016 through current 2023; 8 years).
- d. Number of women currently serving in each of these career fields since graduating from the initial training course (by FY beginning in 2016 through current 2023; 8 years). Ensure data is separated by officer, enlisted, and rank (e.g., O1, E5, etc.).

Organization	Description
Army	The Army provided the Committee with a response.
Navy	The Navy provided the Committee with a response.
Marine Corps	The Marine Corps provided the Committee with a response.
Air Force	The Air Force provided the Committee with a response.
SOCOM	SOCOM provided the Committee with a response.

RFIs 5-7

**PREGANNCY DISCRIMINATION**

In accordance with DACOWITS’ Terms of Reference, the Well-Being and Treatment (WB&T) Subcommittee will determine if there are gaps in institutional policies and procedures that obstruct pregnant servicewomen from progressing in their military career and recommend policy changes.

RFI 5

In 2020, Congress passed the “Rent the Camo: Access to Maternity Wear Act” Bill (H.R. 7289), which directed the “*Department of Defense to carry out a pilot program to establish an office for issuing maternity-related uniform items to pregnant members of the Armed Forces, on a temporary basis through FY26 and at no cost to such members.*” In January 2022, the Navy launched a maternity uniform pilot program, which is open to officer and enlisted personnel assigned CONUS and OCONUS. In March 2022, the Marine Corps launched a maternity uniform pilot program, which is

restricted to female officers located within 100 miles of MCB Quantico. In June 2022, the Department of the Air Force launched a maternity uniform pilot program, which is open to officer and enlisted Airman/Guardians, assigned to 10 specific bases. In December 2022, via RFI 5d.i, the Military Services provided updates to their maternity uniforms. During this meeting, the Department of the Air Force showcased their redesigned maternity dress and aviation uniforms.

The Committee requests a **written response** from the **Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Department of the Air Force, and Coast Guard** detailing maternity uniform pilot programs, maternity uniforms currently in use, as well as plans to update maternity uniforms.

- a. Provide an update on the status of your Service’s maternity uniform pilot program (e.g., utilization rate, findings, etc.).
- b. **Army:** Has a maternity uniform pilot program been implemented? If not, when is it expected to begin? Provide additional details (e.g., who can/will be able to participate (officer and/or enlisted); geographic location(s); etc.).
- c. **Marine Corps:** Provide the rationale for restricting the pilot to female officers within a 100-mile radius of MCB Quantico.
- d. In September 2016, via RFI 11, the Committee asked the Military Services to provide information/data on current maternity uniforms and any future prototypes (to include those being wear tested/piloted). Update this information/data utilizing a blank Maternity Uniforms Chart for questions 1-18.
- e. Do the Services collaborate on maternity uniform design concepts? If so, how and at what level?
- f. Do the Services separately contract for maternity uniform production, and do they use a common or separate vendor?
- g. Who has the lead for the procurement of maternity uniforms?
- h. How long does the process take for selection (e.g., award to contract to delivery)?
- i. Provide a flow chart which depicts the steps from design to production to procurement to receipt. Annotate the timeline between each phase.

Organization	Description
Army	The Army provided the Committee with a response.
Navy	The Navy provided the Committee with a response.
Marine Corps	The Marine Corps provided the Committee with a response.
Department of the Air Force	The Department of the Air Force provided the Committee with a response.
Coast Guard	The Coast Guard provided the Committee with a response.

RFI 6

Congress enacted legislation in the FY22 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) which directed the SecDef to prescribe regulations by December 27, 2022, to preserve the parental guardianship rights of a cadet or midshipman who becomes pregnant or fathers a child, while attending a Military Service Academies (MSAs), consistent with the individual and academic responsibilities of such cadet or midshipman. It is important to note that this legislation did not provide guidance that pertains to enlisted Service members enrolled in Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) commissioning programs.

The Committee requests a **written response** from the **Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD(P&R)), the MSAs, and Military Services (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Department of the Air Force, and Coast Guard)** to address the following questions:

- a. **USD(P&R):** Has this legislation been enacted, if so, when? If not yet enacted, what is the expected implementation date?
- b. **MSAs:** Will affected cadets and midshipmen in Service as of the Congressionally directed enactment date be grandfathered (i.e., able to avail themselves of the new rules)?
- c. **MSAs:** Provide copies of and links to the implementing DoD directives and guidance.
- d. **MSAs:** Has Service guidance been issued? If so, provide copies.
- e. **MSAs:** How many cadets and midshipmen are currently waiting for the Act to be implemented?
- f. **Military Services:** Provide the instruction(s) which delineate policy guidance for pregnant and postpartum ROTC students. In addition, provide the instruction(s) which delineate policy guidance for enlisted pregnant and postpartum Service members enrolled in ROTC commissioning programs.

Organization	Description
DoD M&RA	DoD M&RA provided the Committee with a response.
Army	The Army provided the Committee with a response.
Navy	The Navy provided the Committee with a response.
Marine Corps	The Marine Corps provided the Committee with a response.
Department of the Air Force	The Department of the Air Force provided the Committee with a response.
Coast Guard	The Coast Guard provided the Committee with a response.

#### RFI 7

In December 2017, via RFI 4, the Committee asked about the Military Services related to pregnant/postpartum residency at development professional military education (PME) schools, to include Command and General Staff College, War College, Senior Enlisted Academies, Top Level Schools, or the Service equivalent. The Committee remains concerned about whether pregnant or postpartum servicewomen are being permitted to attend PME. In 2022, the Army published a new directive titled, “*Army Directive 2022-06 (Parenthood, Pregnancy, and Postpartum)*,” which outlines that a pregnancy profile will not inhibit women from attending PME. In addition, in cases in which fitness testing is required to satisfy eligibility and/or graduation requirements, a passing physical fitness test of record dated within the last 24 months must receive a waiver from the school’s commandant.

The Committee requests an updated **written response** from the **Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Space Force, and Coast Guard** regarding current policies. Provide the following:

- a. Are there any barriers, prohibitions, or other restrictions preventing pregnant or postpartum servicewomen from attending? If so, what are they?
- b. Is completion of a fitness test or fitness assessment waived, if not an essential element of the PME?
- c. Does your Service have a similar regulation to the Army’s which delineates PME requirements for pregnant or postpartum servicewomen? If so, provide.

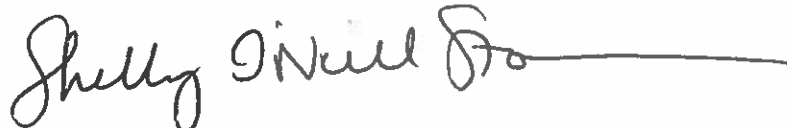
d. Who has oversight of school commandant policies/regulations related to the approval/disapproval of eligibility and/or graduation requirements for pregnant or postpartum servicewomen? Who has the authority to grant fitness waivers? Is there an appeal process?	
Organization	Description
Army	The Army provided the Committee with a response.
Navy	The Navy provided the Committee with a response.
Marine Corps	The Marine Corps provided the Committee with a response.
Air Force	The Department of the Air Force provided the Committee with a response.
Space Force	The Space Force provided the Committee with a response.
Coast Guard	The Coast Guard provided the Committee with a response.

**Report Submitted by:**

*Samantha J. Frazier*

**LTC Samantha J. Frazier, USA**  
DACOWITS Military Director &  
Designated Federal Officer

**Report Certified by:**



**Ms. Shelly O'Neill Stoneman**  
DACOWITS Chair

**DACOWITS Members in Attendance**

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CAPT (Ret.) Kenneth J. Barrett, USN  
VADM (Ret.) Robin R. Braun, USNR  
Dr. (CAPT Ret.) Catherine W. Cox, USNR  
Dr. Trudi C. Ferguson  
CMDCM (Ret.) Octavia D. Harris, USN  
Ms. Robin S. Kelleher

Ms. Marquette J. Leveque, USN Vet.  
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HON (Col Ret.) Dawn E. B. Scholz, J.D., USAF  
Brig Gen (Ret.) Allyson R. Solomon, ANG  
Ms. Shelly O'Neill Stoneman  
Dr. (Col Ret.) Samantha A. Weeks, USAF

**DACOWITS' Executive Staff in Attendance**

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Ms. Jessica C. Myers, USN Ret.

Mr. Robert D. Bowling, USAF Ret.  
MSgt Courtney N. Reid, USAF

**DACOWITS' Liaisons in Attendance**

COL Caprissa S. Brown-Slade, USA  
MAJ Robert D. Lindsey, USA (virtual)  
Chaplain (CAPT) Judy T. Malana, USN  
Ms. Wendy D. Boler, USN  
LtCol Rhonda C. Martin, USMC  
Dr. Christie Oates, DAF  
CDR Gretal Kinney, USCG  
LT Olivia M. Chang, USCG  
CPO Erica N. Pierre, USCG

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Ms. Deadrea J. Sampson, SOCOM (virtual)  
Ms. Theresa A. Hart, DHA  
Ms. Kimberly R. Lahm, HA  
Ms. Lindsay E. Reiner, MPP (virtual)  
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Mr. Vesen L. Thompson, MC&FP  
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