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**PREPARED STATEMENT**

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**REMEDICATION AND IMPACT OF PFAS ON SERVICEMEMBERS**

**BEFORE THE**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND**

**RELATED AGENCIES**

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Chairman Wasserman Schultz, Ranking Member Carter, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the subcommittee today.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD or Department) is committed to protecting the health and safety of our personnel and beneficiaries, and the communities that we work and live in. The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs supports the Department's per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) Task Force efforts through public, environmental, and occupational health expertise and activities.

The Department regularly collaborates with other federal agencies to receive the latest occupational and public health PFAS guidance. We primarily collaborate with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which includes the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). Over the last several years, ATSDR has been conducting environmental assessments and public health studies associated with PFAS-impacted drinking water and other sources of PFAS exposures. In addition, the CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health have begun evaluating potential firefighter PFAS exposures from their response activities and are collaborating with the National Institute of Standards and Technologies to evaluate firefighter protective clothing. This information and updates on DoD efforts are regularly shared and discussed with the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) through our DoD/VA Deployment Health Work Group.

The Department also engages with other federal agencies and scientific organizations to maintain awareness of the evolving science regarding potential PFAS health impacts, toxicity, and exposure. The Department routinely collaborates with the U.S. Environmental Protection

Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the National Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM). As these science-based efforts are finalized and new information becomes available, a better understanding of those at risk and potential environmental impacts from exposures to PFAS will emerge. These efforts should improve our understanding of the potential for exposure to PFAS, and bring clarity regarding how much exposure, for how long, and what types of health effects may result.

In October, as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, the Department began offering and providing blood testing to determine and document potential exposure to PFAS for each DoD firefighter that receives an annual physical. Because PFAS have been found in the blood of humans and animals worldwide, the Department worked with our interagency partners to develop fact sheets for occupational medicine physicians and firefighters, and a letter template provided to each firefighter that provides context for their individual results. As indicated by ATSDR, most of the U.S. population has some level of PFAS in their blood. With regard to interpretation of results, ATSDR clinical guidance indicates that “there are no health-based screening levels for specific PFAS that clinicians can compare to concentrations measured in blood samples. As a result, interpretation of measured PFAS concentrations in individuals is limited in its use.”<sup>1</sup>

All Active Duty, Reserve, National Guard, and DoD civilian firefighters are being offered this PFAS blood testing, and were identified through coordination with the Military Departments and DoD Agencies<sup>2</sup> using job series, position description, and military occupational specialty titles for assessment and testing. Since conducting a blood test for PFAS is not routine,

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<sup>1</sup> ATSDR, Overview of the Science and Guidance for Clinicians on Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS), December 6, 2019 (revised). Available at: <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/docs/clinical-guidance-12-20-2019.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Military Departments include the Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force; Defense Agencies (e.g., Defense Logistics Agency)

the Department coordinated with the CDC and DoD laboratorians to identify appropriate laboratories for testing. Identification of NMS Labs was based on its capabilities and experience in analyzing PFAS, and capacity to analyze the approximately 20,000+ samples (one for each firefighter) from October 1, 2020 through September 30, 2021. Each DoD firefighter's individual results are being added to their occupational medical records.

Both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees have requested that future exposure assessments include first responders in addition to firefighters. In response, we are developing a plan to evaluate testing blood and tracking first responders, and, as requested, will provide this information later this year.

I am grateful for the opportunity to provide further detail on our PFAS-related efforts to ensure the safety of our military members, civilian workforce, their families, and our Military Health System beneficiaries. Thank you to the members of this Committee for your commitment to the men and women of our Armed Forces, DoD civilians, and the families and communities who support them.