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The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
Chairwoman
Senate Armed Services, Personnel Subcommittee
478 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Fax: 202-228-0282

Dear Chairwoman Gillibrand:

The Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) respectfully requests that your distinguished Subcommittee consider holding an oversight hearing on Navy morale problems.

National Public Radio (NPR) and NBC News recently reported an increase in desertions from the Navy. In 2021, Navy desertions increased with 157 sailors illegally fleeing the Navy, more than double the number who deserted in 2019. All but eight of them eventually returned to their units.

The Navy has seen an increase in desertions over the previous three years. In 2019, 63 sailors fled from their duty stations, and another 98 did so in 2020, a Navy spokesperson, Lt. Cmdr. Devin Arneson, told NPR. The number of deserters still at large had been on the decline between 2017 and 2019.

The NPR report noted that other branches of the military did not see a similar increase in the past three years. Desertions in the Army dropped by 47 percent, from 328 in 2019 to 174 in 2021, and the Marine Corps reported 59 in 2019 and 31 in 2021. The Coast Guard did not record a single deserter between 2019 and 2021.

Also, FRA members are deeply concerned about reports of suicide in the Navy. The rash of suicides on the USS George Washington -- an aircraft carrier undergoing major shipyard work at Newport News, Virginia, is especially alarming with 10 suicides in 10 months.¹ Military suicides in every branch have risen sharply. In 2020, 384 active-duty service members died by suicide, a 44 percent increase from 2015. Since 2014, 4,842 service members have killed themselves².

FRA welcomes the earlier Congressional hearings on this issue and recommends additional Congressional oversight specially on Navy morale. The Association supports improvements of VA and Defense Department suicide prevention programs to reduce the rate of suicide among veterans and active-duty service members.


¹ Military.com 5/18/22

² Ibid 4/20/22

FRA is a leader in the military/veterans organization community and represents Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard enlisted personnel on compensation, benefits and quality of life programs and works to improve benefits for these service members, their families and survivors.

The point of contact at FRA is John Davis, Director of Legislative Programs, at the above numbers or (john@fra.org).

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER J. SLAWINSKI
National Executive Director

CJS:jd:tw

cc: Ranking Member Thom Tillis