

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051
MINORITY (202) 225-5074
<https://oversight.house.gov>

Opening Statement of Chairman Stephen F. Lynch Subcommittee on National Security Hearing on “JROTC: Protecting Cadets from Sexual Abuse and Instructor Misconduct” November 16, 2022

Good morning, everyone. Today the Subcommittee on National Security will examine the Department of Defense and military services’ administration and oversight of the Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps program, or JROTC.

As established by Congress, the statutory purpose of JROTC is to instill in our nation’s high school students “the values of citizenship, service to the United States...and personal responsibility and a sense of accomplishment.” In furtherance of that objective, JROTC offers participating high school students, or cadets, an immersive military learning environment that includes coursework in leadership, civics, ethics, history, health, and STEM, as well as service-specific classes in seamanship, land navigation, aviation history, and aerospace science. The program also provides cadets an important opportunity to visit military installations off-campus and participate in other extracurricular activities with fellow students.

As Chairman of the Subcommittee on National Security, I believe that the JROTC Program is instrumental in developing our young people who may be inspired to embark on a life dedicated to military or civilian public service. That is precisely why the program must be subject to meaningful oversight and operate with maximum transparency and accountability – for the benefit, health, and safety of every cadet.

Regrettably, that is not currently the case. In July 2022, an extensive *New York Times* investigation concluded that within the past five years, JROTC instructors have been criminally charged with sexual misconduct involving students at a rate that is “far higher than the rate of civilian high school teachers.” The investigation also found that many other JROTC instructors have been accused of misconduct but never charged. Our own Subcommittee investigation has further revealed that the extent of instructor misconduct within JROTC is even more disturbing than previously reported.

In a moment, we will hear testimony from DOD and the military services about the actions they are taking to ensure the safety and well-being of JROTC cadets. I look forward to hearing more about how they are working to improve the vetting and certification of JROTC instructors, how allegations of instructor misconduct are reported and handled, and how the military services conduct oversight of their respective JROTC programs.

I’d like to conclude by framing today’s hearing within a broader strategic context. The United States military—the finest volunteer fighting force in the world—is currently grappling with an unprecedented recruitment and retention challenge. This is driven, at least in part, by a lack of trust among our nation’s young men and women—and their families—that the United States military will protect them from unnecessary physical and psychological harm both at home and when deployed overseas.

Many of the young men and women who join JROTC do so with the noblest aspirations of serving our country, either in military or civilian service. And so when they don their military uniforms—even as high school students—they are entitled to such protections as we would wish for our own sons and daughters. As the Department of Defense and Congress continue to address our current readiness and recruitment challenges, it is vital that we restore and maintain the public’s faith in military service. We can begin by

demonstrating to those who are eager to serve our country that we do not take their health and safety lightly. It is imperative that we honor the sacred commitment of our JROTC cadets by ensuring that they are being educated in a military culture and environment that prioritizes their well-being and is reflective of their service on behalf of our nation.

I thank our witnesses for testifying today, and I will now yield to the distinguished Ranking Member from Wisconsin, Mr. Grothman, for his opening statement.

###

Contact: Nelly Decker, Communications Director, (202) 226-5181