

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

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Introduction

Chairman Grothman, Ranking Member Garcia, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the Department of Defense's (DoD) oversight of the V-22 Osprey Program and our ongoing work to ensure the safety of the aircraft. I am proud to be here today to discuss how we are inculcating a culture of safety across the Department, and specifically how our actions are driving the safe return of the V-22 Osprey to flight. Our partnerships across the Department are key to maintaining that culture of safety, and I am pleased to be here today with Vice Admiral Carl Chebi and Mr. Gary Kurtz to describe the Department's efforts to ensure the safety of the V-22 Osprey and our Service members.

As a Department, it is our duty to protect our greatest resource, our people. We continually underscore the importance of safety at every level in the Department – from our newest recruit to our most senior commander – to ensure an environment where safety and risk management remain a core value engrained as an essential and integrated part of our operations. The Department continues to proactively promote a culture of safety, where there is a shared commitment, emphasis, and urgency placed on deliberate communications, consistent resourcing, and elevated ownership of risk decisions.

The Defense Safety Oversight Council

The Department has an established safety oversight structure, which allows us to coordinate safety actions across the Total Force. The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness is responsible for establishing safety policies, plans, and programs to assist the Department in managing risk and preventing accidents and injuries to military and civilian personnel across the Total Force. Safety is inextricably linked with readiness; by

ensuring the safety of our Service members, we can better prepare them to train, deploy, and defend our nation's interests when called upon.

The Department executes our safety mission by leveraging the Defense Safety Oversight Council (DSOC), established by the Deputy Secretary of Defense in 2003, as the Department's senior safety forum to provide governance on DoD-wide efforts to address the most significant challenges facing the safety and health of our people. The DSOC brings senior DoD leaders from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, and the Military Services together to discuss safety challenges; review safety trends; improve safety visibility, communication, and accountability; share lessons learned; and coordinate with the private sector and other government agencies to exchange best practices.

The Department of the Defense, through the DSOC, continues to pursue a holistic, proactive risk management approach with a sustained focus to drive improved safety outcomes, address the overall increase in Class 'A' manned aviation mishaps, and oversee a multitude of other safety and occupational health challenges. Through the DSOC, we are focused on creating behavioral change, ensuring the implementation of comprehensive safety management systems, and promoting data-informed, deliberative risk-based decisions for our Service members.

The Joint Safety Council

The Joint Safety Council (JSC) is another key component of the Department's safety architecture. Enacted in 2022 as an advisory body within the office of the Deputy Secretary of Defense, it is comprised of the Directors of Safety for each of the Military Departments, as well as a senior executive from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the JSC was established "to

provide DoD leaders the information needed to strengthen DoD aviation safety initiatives and coordinate aviation safety activities across the Department and the Services.” The Department appreciates Congress’s foresight to expand the JSC’s scope to include mitigating safety risks and reducing mishaps in operational and training settings, including aviation, space, afloat, ground maneuver, tactical weapons, and equipment systems, and infrastructure support.

The JSC has convened 14 times since its establishment in June 2022 and continues to meet on an at least a quarterly basis. The JSC’s mandate to prevent future accidents encompasses safety analysis sharing, the protection of safety information, and standardizing mishap reporting. The JSC has consistently noted the criticality of collaborating, coordinating, and mitigating risks across several common platforms and is also facilitating operational mishap information-sharing at the Military Service level.

The JSC continues to integrate into DoD’s Safety and Occupational Health activities and advises the Department’s senior leaders on significant operational safety decisions. As the JSC fully matures, the Department is confident the JSC will continue to enhance its efficacy to coordinate efforts and advise senior leaders on operational safety.

Safety Oversight of the V-22 Osprey

The Department is committed to the safety, health, and well-being of our Service members, including those who operate, maintain, and are transported in the V-22 Osprey. In response to the CV-22B Osprey mishap in Japan in late November 2023 and the airframe’s recent return to flight, the Office of the Secretary of Defense—through the DSOC and with the advice of the JSC—is engaging with the Military Departments, Services, and the V-22 Joint Program Office to ensure the continued safety and reliability of the aircraft. Through the

DSOC, the Department's senior safety officials and other leaders receive routine updates from the Military Departments and the JSC about the status of each Service's plan to return the V-22 Osprey to flight, which adopt a "crawl, walk, run" approach that allows aircrews to gradually regain proficiency with the aircraft as they assume increasingly complex mission-related tasks. The Services' plans to return the V-22 Osprey to flight include assessments of the interrelated safety, operational, training, and maintenance aspects of resumed flight operations. The Military Departments will also make specific recommendations and implement mitigation measures based upon any identified materiel failures that may have contributed to the November 2023 V-22 Osprey mishap. In addition, the JSC continues to support the ongoing comprehensive reviews of the V-22 Osprey being conducted by the Military Departments and Services and will advise the DSOC of any policy, resource, and technical constraints or gaps not previously identified that might impact the continued safe operation of the aircraft.

Conclusion

As a Department, we are working relentlessly to minimize safety and occupational health risks to the Total Force. We do this every day by working to understand causal mishap factors, identifying mitigations, addressing exposures, strengthening policy, and incorporating actions to prevent both on- and off-duty accidents. The Department is committed to instituting an effective and enduring Department-wide culture of safety that yields safer workplaces, fewer mishaps, enhanced readiness, and that supports one of Secretary Austin's key priorities: "Taking Care of Our People." The DSOC and JSC are critical to our mishap reduction efforts to proactively identify trends and indicators, and share best practices and lessons learned to ensure the safest possible operational and training environments for our Service members. We appreciate the

opportunity to share with you how seriously we take our safety oversight responsibilities and how we are consistently and proactively striving to detect and mitigate risks before mishaps occur.