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Statement of
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before the
Committee on House Administration

“Serving and Voting: Oversight of the Federal Voting Assistance Program”

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Chairman Steil, ranking member Morelle, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department's implementation of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA). This law ensures military members, their eligible family members, and overseas U.S. citizens are aware of their right to vote and have the tools and resources to successfully do so – from anywhere in the world in elections for federal offices.

The Department's Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) carries out the federal responsibilities of the Act as delegated by the Secretary of Defense, who is the Presidential Designee. As mandated by the Act, FVAP prescribes two uniform absentee voting forms for use by UOCAVA voters. The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) form is used for voter registration and absentee ballot request; and the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) form is used by voters as an emergency "back-up" ballot in cases where their requested state ballot does not arrive promptly. The FVAP reviews these forms each election cycle to ensure they are usable and understandable to voters as well as acceptable for processing by the 55 states, territories, and the District of Columbia.

In its administration of UOCAVA, FVAP works cooperatively with state and local election officials to ensure they understand their responsibilities in carrying out its provisions. The absentee voting process for UOCAVA citizens involves several steps. The citizen registers to vote and requests an absentee ballot from his or her local election official using the FPCA. Upon receipt of the completed FPCA, the local election official determines the citizen's legal voting residence based on the information provided. At least 45 days prior to elections for federal office, the local election official provides a state absentee ballot to the citizen either by mail or electronically. The citizen votes the ballot and sends it back to his or her local election

official as provided by state law. These steps traditionally are accomplished through the United States Postal Service, the Military Postal Service Agency, U.S. embassy and consulate pouch service, and foreign postal systems with many states allowing other transmittal methods for UOCAVA absentee voting materials.

The Department devotes considerable effort to ensure that UOCAVA citizens are properly informed and educated about the process of absentee voting. First is the Voting Assistance Guide and the FVAP.gov website, both of which provide voters state-by-state instructions for completion of the forms. Secondly, education includes formal training of military and Department of State Voting Assistance Officers, providing information to state and local election officials, and ensuring that UOCAVA citizens understand their right to vote and can do so successfully from anywhere in the world.

The Federal Voting Assistance Program website (www.fvap.gov) is a critical asset to uniformed Service members, their voting age family members, and U.S. citizens overseas, providing remote access to voting information directly on their device with mobile visits in 2024 outweighing desktop visits 56% to 43%. FVAP.gov received almost six million hits in 2024 through direct traffic, organic searches, paid media, social media, referrals, and emails. Over 600,000 users completed the online FPCA completion tool with approximately 75,000 completing the online FWAB completion tool.

FVAP staff conduct Voting Assistance Officer hands-on training so they understand their mission and can successfully perform their duties. For the 2024 election cycle, FVAP staff members trained nearly 3,000 voting officers through 161 workshops conducted worldwide. This included 94 workshops that were conducted on-site at military installations around the world for Voting Assistance Officers. Additionally, 67 workshops were conducted at the

Department of State installations for State Department Voting Assistance Officers and for civilian members of U.S. citizen organizations who assist others with the absentee voting process. These include sessions held at the Department of State Foreign Service Institute in Arlington.

For Voting Assistance Officers who are unable to attend an in-person workshop, virtual and online options are available to receive certified training. Voting Assistance Officers may complete the online training module at FVAP.gov or attend an in-person installation or regional session held by the military service. In addition to the in-person and on-line training opportunities, the FVAP website provides Voting Assistance Officers with all the necessary tools and resources they require to carry out their responsibilities. The DoD Inspector General performs an annual evaluation of the effectiveness of the Department and Service voting assistance programs and found that during 2024 the Services complied with and were effective in meeting the requirements of UOCAVA and DoDI 1000.04, Federal Voting Assistance Program.

The FVAP.gov website also provides specific information for local election officials. As state and local election officials are the individuals who administer U.S elections, they are key allies in facilitating absentee voting for military members, their families, and U.S. citizens residing overseas. The FVAP works with states and localities throughout the two-year federal election cycle to produce its publications and ensure the state-specific regulations, deadlines, and contact information are accurate and up to date.

To help ensure states and localities understand their responsibilities under UOCAVA, FVAP staff have attended and addressed officials at conferences of the following national election official organizations:

- National Association of Secretaries of State

- National Association of State Election Directors
- National Association of Election Officials (Election Center) Joint Election

Official Liaison Committee

FVAP staff also traveled to address several state conferences of local election officials.

In preparation for 2024, the FVAP attended and addressed 20 state and local election officials at meetings in:

Arizona	North Carolina
Florida	North Dakota
Georgia	Ohio
Iowa	Oklahoma
Louisiana	Oregon
Maryland	South Carolina
Massachusetts	Texas
Montana	Utah
Nebraska	Washington
Nevada	West Virginia

When addressing these state and local election officials, the FVAP reminds them of the responsibilities, practices, and procedures to ensure maximum compliance with UOCAVA. This includes a reminder to transmit requested UOCAVA ballots by the 45th day prior to elections for federal office, offer an electronic option for transmitting blank ballots, provide a free access system for voters to verify receipt of ballot, and notify the voter if, and why, their registration or ballot request is rejected. The FVAP also ensures states and localities understand some of the unique aspects of the UOCAVA absentee voting process to include: military spouses having a

choice where to align their residency between their own legal voting address and that of their military spouse; prior physical presence not necessarily being required; the exemption from National Voter Registration Act state identification requirements; states' determination of voters satisfying residency requirements; the voter's last address in the United States remaining the valid address for voting purposes; and that all election materials sent to UOCAVA voters are postage free.

The Department works hard to ensure that uniformed service voters are informed about upcoming elections as well as the procedures for registering and requesting an absentee ballot. In 2024, the FVAP continued to build upon research-based strategies that proved successful in 2020 and 2022 to increase brand recognition and raise awareness of FVAP resources, including positioning FVAP.gov as the leading official source of absentee voting information for the military, their families, and overseas citizens. These strategies included:

- encouraging voters to act earlier to avoid missing deadlines;
- increasing the number of UOCAVA voters reached through advanced data science techniques;
- reaching voters directly in their homes and through trusted community organizations;
- outreach methods to drive U.S. citizens who want to vote but require assistance to FVAP.gov and local installations or Department of State resources; and
- focusing on the absentee voting steps that specific UOCAVA audiences found most problematic.

Specific tactics used in 2022 based on lessons learned and stakeholder recommendations included:

- deadlines throughout the election cycle to spur action along with reminders about those deadlines;

- information and resources with a customer service orientation to guide a voter throughout the entire absentee voting process; and

- access to tools that simplify completion and submission of the FPCA and FWAB.

Throughout 2024, FVAP communicated the key message that military members, their eligible family members, and overseas U.S. citizens can vote in federal elections from anywhere in the world. FVAP adjusts its messaging to coincide with the overall election calendar and addresses each step of the voting process for UOCAVA voters. Messaging in 2024 continued to put greater emphasis on using the FPCA (to identify oneself as a UOCAVA voter to state and local election offices), highlighting states and localities as trusted and accurate sources of election information, clarifying state voting residency guidelines, and using the FWAB as a backup ballot. FVAP's integrated marketing and communications campaign achieved its goals of engaging UOCAVA voters through a combination of advertising, news media, social media, and direct outreach. The campaign was focused on driving voters to FVAP.gov and encouraging voters to use the online form completion tools or downloadable forms to complete the FPCA and FWAB for submission to their election office. As required by UOCAVA, email blasts about voting were sent monthly to every active-duty Service member. Election reminders were also included on leave and earnings statements of all Service members and overseas DoD personnel.

Communication is facilitated through extensive command support. Messages regarding absentee voting are included on the Military Service websites, in the Plans of the Day, and at Commander's Call briefings. Physical and electronic banners were deployed on domestic and foreign based U.S. installations to inform Service members and eligible family members of their

right to vote. Installations support Armed Forces Voters Week, Military Spouse Voters Week, and Absentee Voting Week. Efforts extend to family members through displays, voter registration drives, and information at Morale, Welfare and Recreation Facilities, Family Service Centers, medical facilities, commissaries and exchanges, and DoD Education Activity Schools.

The FVAP also cooperates in sharing state-specific UOCAVA absentee voting information with non-governmental voter assistance organizations. As some organizations' online tools may offer voters digitized signing methods or submit the voter's documents through an organizational email address, the FVAP works to connect these organizations directly with states to help ensure states and localities are able to accept and process forms as generated through third party sites.

Congressional funding has allowed the FVAP to award grant funding directly to 24 states and local consortiums administering elections to explore reduction of failure rates for UOCAVA voters and establish and maintain a pipeline of data, ideas, techniques, and best practices for election officials nationwide as they serve these voters. The grantees are using the nearly 25 million dollars in grant funds to establish and operate successful, sustainable, and affordable tools to improve UOCAVA required electronic transmission of outbound (blank) ballots sent from election offices to voters, track outbound mailed ballots, and explore the use of digital signature verification like the Department of Defense Common Access Card on election documents.

In summary, the Department provides voters and Voting Assistance Officers the tools, materials, and information necessary to facilitate registration, ballot request, and ballot transmission. The Services distribute Voting Assistance Guides, FPCAs and FWABs to their installation and unit level Voting Assistance Officers and individual voters. Finally, the number

of voters assisted, and the type of assistance provided are tracked by the Services using FVAP's Admin Portal.

Over the last two years, the Department has continued to build on the successes of the past. Efforts of the Department, the U.S. Postal Service, the Department of Justice, the Department of State, other federal agencies, and state and local governments are giving UOCAVA voters the opportunity to participate again in 2026 and future elections.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I thank you, the Ranking Member, and the members of this Committee for your outstanding and unwavering support of those who vote under UOCAVA protections and the men and women who proudly wear the uniform in defense of our great Nation.