

U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor Written Testimony for the U.S. House Armed Services Committee (HASC) Member Day on April 15, 2026

Thank you, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the House Committee on Armed Services, for the opportunity to provide testimony outlining some of my priorities for the Fiscal Year 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The NDAA is one of the most crucial pieces of legislation for the Congress to pass each year, and I appreciate the detailed, bipartisan work this Committee's members and staff do to navigate the NDAA process and bolster our armed services.

Thank you for the opportunity to share some of my priorities as the representative of Florida's 14th District, the Tampa Bay Area. My district is home to MacDill Air Force base, which supports a strong workforce of 16,799 personnel, comprised of 7,608 military personnel and 8,147 civilian personnel. Additionally, the base serves 11,147 military dependents, 240,000 DoD (TRICARE) beneficiaries, 37,900 military retirees, and 34,600 surviving spouses and dependents in the Tampa Bay region. MacDill hosts two Air Refueling Wings, the 6th and 927th, which operate 24 KC-135 Stratotankers and are in the process of transitioning capabilities to the KC-46 Pegasus. It is host to two Unified Combatant Commands: United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) and United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM/SOCOM). Additionally, 33 mission partners are maintained out of MacDill. Team MacDill plays a vital and central role in U.S. and allied defense, global security, and power projection. Collectively, its workforce contributes to our military's air refueling capabilities, joint command coordination, and special forces missions.

As you work on crafting this year's NDAA, I would like to bring your attention to three topics of critical importance to MacDill presently: strength of SOCOM, quality and accountability of base housing, and retention of civilian workforce.

SOCOM

Beginning with SOCOM, I appreciate this committee's focused efforts within the Intelligence and Special Operations Subcommittee, through the leadership of Chairman Jackson and Ranking Member Crow. I strongly support their efforts to address SOCOM's budget, which has been stagnant for nearly a decade now, and encourage this Committee to increase authorization for the command's budget to \$20B. While SOCOM makes up roughly 3% of the Department's budget, and 2% of its workforce, its outsized value and the demand we place on it is something we must meet with increased authorized resources.

One area of real need within SOCOM that I would like to highlight is the modernization of its Headquarters (HQ) campus based at MacDill. Over the past two years, I have visited with and heard directly from SOCOM leadership and personnel about the age-related infrastructure shortfalls that are negatively impacting the function of the command. SOCOM's HQ was first constructed in 1968 to meet the needs of the U.S. Strike Command, a 20th century mission. Now 58 years later, the HQ has not seen much development. A modern, secure and functional

headquarters is critical to meet the complex and evolving 21st century mission needs of SOCOM. This need must be met with facilities that are equipped with advanced controlled spaces, expanded in size to match personnel growth, and constructed with resiliency in mind. I have been grateful for the partnership in advocacy from my fellow SOF Caucus Co-Chairs, Reps. Ronny Jackson, Scott Peters, and Richard Hudson through our joint outreach to the Department of Defense as well as submissions to the Appropriations Committee to draw attention to this matter over the past two years. It is my understanding that SOCOM has had their own engagement with the Department, as well as members of HASC and SASC on this issue. I strongly encourage this committee to put forward authorization efforts to address the needs of SOCOM HQ.

BASE HOUSING

A second area I would like to highlight is the quality of military housing, and specifically the Department of Defense's oversight of privatized housing companies operating on military installations, like MacDill. With the leadership of this committee, Congress took great strides to enhance the rights of service members and their families through the establishment of the Tenant Bill of Rights in the FY2020 NDAA. I am grateful for the Department's implementation of these tools to empower our service members and support the assurance of quality housing through stronger lease protections, maintenance and safety standards, and communication between landlords and tenants. Unfortunately, unacceptable issues remain across many military installations, including MacDill. Significant issues regarding delayed and inadequate repairs, particularly to address mold, have persisted since 2019 to the present day at MacDill's Harbor Bay housing. These longstanding issues were only exacerbated by the 2024 hurricanes experienced by my community, and the private housing company's, Michaels Organization, inability to provide adequate service to its tenants has most recently resulted in its placement on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) by the Department of the Air Force. While I understand there are protocols and processes to follow within the Department's contractual agreement with these privatized housing companies, it is crucial for the Department and the Congress to prioritize its commitment to safe, healthy and dignified housing for our service members and their families. In the FY26 NDAA, I submitted an amendment to require a quarterly report to Congress on the performance standards and quality of service provided by privatized housing companies to military installations, specifically those located in extreme weather impacted areas, though it was ultimately not adopted. For the FY27 NDAA, I implore this committee to put forward provisions to reinforce the level and consistency of oversight towards these companies.

CIVILIAN WORKFORCE AND LOCALITY PAY

A third and final topic I would like to draw this committee's attention to is the locality pay adjustment system and its impact on the civilian workforce supporting the Department. Presently, the Tampa/St. Petersburg Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) falls under the "Rest of U.S." locality pay area designation and does not reflect the reality of the rising cost of living in the area. Of significance to our nation's defense capabilities, this current designation does not compete with

the levels of compensation provided by non-federal employers with the U.S. military in the Tampa Bay region. This has had such an impact on MacDill's operations that in 2024, an 8-star memo was sent by the USCENTCOM AND USSOCOM Commanders to the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and the Secretary of Labor expressing concern of locality pay's impacts to the recruitment and retention of civilian employees who are vital to the military missions at MacDill. Though not adopted in the final FY26 NDAA, I submitted an amendment to require the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Director of OPM, to conduct a study assessing the locality pay system for Department of Defense employees specifically. While crafting the FY27 NDAA, I encourage the committee to consider such a request and further explore tools and incentives to address limitations in the current locality pay system that have led to recruitment and retention challenges in critical national security and defense-related functions.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I look forward to working with members and staff of this committee to advance the priorities I have presented in efforts to support MacDill's personnel and families, and our military as a whole, within a strong NDAA for Fiscal Year 2027.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Castor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathy Castor
United States Representative
Florida – District 14