

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL  
RELEASED BY THE SENATE  
ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**STATEMENT OF  
SERGEANT MAJOR IRA J. LOTT  
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS  
SERGEANT MAJOR OF  
MARINE CORPS AIR BASES WESTERN AREA,  
MCAS MIRAMAR, CA  
BEFORE THE  
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS AND MANAGEMENT  
ON  
21 MARCH 2001  
CONCERNING  
INSTALLATION READINESS**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am Sergeant Major Ira Lott, Sergeant Major of Marine Corps Air bases Western Area, Marine Corps Air Station, Miramar, California. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. I am particularly pleased that you have chosen to focus on the condition of the infrastructure, facilities and family housing at Miramar. I would like to concentrate my discussion this morning on military family housing.

As a result of BRAC legislation, we closed two of our Marine Corps Air Stations in Orange County, California and moved to a single site in San Diego. The location of MCAS Miramar is ideal because of its proximity to other key military facilities and training areas in the region. BRAC funded most of our barracks requirements and we have come a long way in our facilities renovation. The critical shortfall we are experiencing in San Diego is in military family housing. The move to San Diego required us to vacate approximately 2,800 military units that housed 60% of our married Marines. With only 527 military family housing units located aboard MCAS Miramar, we entered into a regional housing alliance with the Navy to best support our military families. Our partnership with Navy housing is highly valued, but we must do more to obtain affordable family housing for our Marines. San Diego Navy Housing currently maintains 9,039 military family housing units and Miramar-based Marine families occupy 1148 of these units; our fair share based on population. Roughly 18 percent of all Marine families assigned to Miramar reside in one of 52 military family housing areas located throughout San Diego County, some over 30 miles from the base. The severe shortage of affordable rental units within reasonable commuting distance of MCAS Miramar adversely impacts quality of life and morale and is an indirect, albeit serious, threat to our readiness. With the likely loss of some of the existing units under the Domestic Lease program, our family housing situation will get worse

before it gets better. Marines who are preoccupied with high housing costs and making ends meet divert their main focus from mission accomplishment. Even in peacetime, much of the work our young Marines do is inherently dangerous and involves great responsibility. Concerns about family safety and finances can impact the Marine's ability to concentrate on his day-to-day mission.

Marine families who live on the local economy have seen their increases in housing allowances gobbled up by skyrocketing housing costs, energy costs, vehicle maintenance, and gasoline prices. Annual adjustments to housing allowances simply can't keep up with the booming San Diego economy and housing shortages. Finding a rental unit is a real challenge in San Diego where the vacancy rate is less than 1%. Junior enlisted Marines with families often opt to occupy quarters located in high-crime areas because of the relative affordability of such neighborhoods. Those Marines who choose safer areas find that their housing allowance is dwarfed by expensive rent. Typical rent in San Diego exceeds the junior Marines' housing allowance by anywhere from 10 to 150 percent.

The Navy Marine Corps team has a Public Private Venture working that will begin to address the housing shortfall by providing 588 new homes, but with thousands of families waiting on waiting lists for well over a year, we need to continue these efforts and accelerate the timeline to produce more houses quicker.

Mr. Chairman, we appreciate your interest and support. This concludes my statement. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.