

JUDY CHU, Ph.D.
27TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

WASHINGTON OFFICE:

2423 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
(202) 225-5464
(202) 225-5467 (Fax)

PASADENA DISTRICT OFFICE:

527 South Lake Avenue, Suite 106
Pasadena, CA 91101
(626) 304-0110

September 8, 2016

Chairman John McCain
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services
Russell Senate Building, Room 228
Washington, D.C. 20510-6050

Ranking Member Jack Reed
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services
Russell Senate Building, Room 228
Washington, D.C. 20510-6050

Chairman Mac Thornberry
Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Adam Smith
Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen McCain and Thornberry and Ranking Members Reed and Smith:

We write to express our strong support for the anti-hazing provisions included in the House version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2017. These provisions would require an annual report on hazing in the military, improve training for servicemembers so they can better recognize and report hazing incidents, require guidance from the Department of Defense (DOD) on how to collect data on hazing, and implement the use of anonymous surveys to evaluate the prevalence of incidents. As the conference negotiations continue, we urge you to keep these important provisions in place to ensure accountability of hazing in the military.

In February 2016, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report after conducting an independent investigation on hazing in the military.¹ The GAO collected available data, interviewed active members of the military and conducted focus groups with servicemembers to obtain a comprehensive view of hazing in all four branches of the military and the Coast Guard. The GAO found that the DOD's actions to address and report incidents of hazing are inadequate.

¹ Farrell, Brenda S. DOD AND COAST GUARD: Actions Needed to Increase Oversight and Management Information on Hazing Incidents Involving Servicemembers. Rep. no. 16-226. GAO. N.p., 9 Feb. 2016. Web.

Specifically, the report indicates that while the “DOD and Coast Guard have issued policies to address hazing, they do not know the extent to which the policies have been implemented, and servicemembers need clarification on the policies.” The GAO also found that while the Army, Navy and the Marine Corps track data on reported hazing incidents, their data is incomplete and inconsistent. For example, the report shows that until October 2015, the Army only tracked cases investigated by criminal investigators or military police, while the Navy required reports on substantiated hazing cases and the Marine Corps required reports on both substantiated and unsubstantiated cases. The Air Force and Coast Guard do not require the collection of hazing incident data at all. Given these findings, the GAO concluded that Congressional oversight is necessary to keep DOD accountable on enforcing anti-hazing policies.

The GAO report made the following four recommendations to improve how the DOD tracks and responds to hazing in the military:

1. Require that the DOD submit an annual report to Congress to ensure that its hazing policies are being consistently implemented throughout the individual branches;
2. Improve existing training, so servicemembers can better identify and respond to hazing;
3. Mandate that the DOD issue guidance on a consistent method to collect hazing data, which includes information on individuals like race and religion; and
4. Use surveys to evaluate the prevalence of hazing beyond the data on individual reporting.

It is imperative that Congress receives annual reports that include comparable data so that we can conduct adequate oversight over DOD’s actions. Objective, independent analysis of DOD’s hazing policies and incidents will help us ensure that we have the necessary, unbiased information that we need to eliminate hazing from our military. Using surveys and improving existing training on hazing prevention will allow servicemembers to properly identify hazing when it occurs, and report its frequency without fear of retribution. Finally, mandating clear, consistent guidance on data collection will eliminate disparities between the branches within the military, and promote greater transparency and understanding of the reported hazing incidents across the branches.

We are pleased to see that the House-passed version of the FY2017 NDAA includes all four recommendations made by the GAO report, and urge you to include each of these provisions in the final conference report. This will ensure that the DOD takes a proactive approach to eradicating hazing within its ranks.

We have seen the ability of Congress to maintain oversight over DOD by receiving annual reports for issues like sexual assault in the military, and we believe that hazing, which traumatizes victims and claims lives, should be treated just as seriously. Hazing crimes often see little justice for the victims, further emboldening the perpetrators and further isolating the victims. It is time we take hazing seriously, and ensure that each of the four provisions included in the House-passed version of the FY2017 NDAA are included in the final conference report.

Respectfully,


Judy Chu, Ph.D.
Member of Congress


Pete Aguilar
Member of Congress

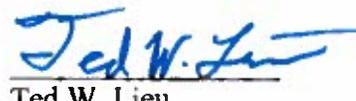

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