

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 20, 2012

Rep. Buck McKeon, Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2120 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Adam Smith, Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2120 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Joe Wilson, Chairman
Subcommittee on Military Personnel
House Armed Services Committee
2120 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Susan Davis, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Military Personnel
House Armed Services Committee
2120 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen McKeon and Wilson and Rankings Member Smith and Davis:

Over the last year there have been several shocking cases of hazing across the Armed Services. While these incidents may seem isolated to some, our inquiries into the military's hazing policies have raised concerns about the lack of focus in the services on preventing hazing and harassment and have highlighted serious gaps in hazing policies. We request that the Armed Services Committee hold formal hearings to protect our brave volunteer soldiers from abuse and to look more closely at the measures each of the Armed Services are taking to prevent hazing and harassment.

In April, 2011, Lance Corporal Harry Lew was ordered to do pushups, crunches and other exercises while he was wearing his full body armor, according to the Marine Corps investigation. One of his superiors stomped on his leg repeatedly when he "failed to do an exercise properly." His fellow Marines poured sand on his face and in his mouth, kicked him and punched him. Shortly after the abuse, Lew committed suicide.

In May, 2011, Private Hamson Daniels McPherson, Jr., stationed in Okinawa, Japan, reportedly set himself on fire and died 19 days later. This occurred after near constant racist hazing and abuse at the hands of his fellow Marines according to his family. McPherson called home regularly and complained to his dad, sister and friends about the racist treatment he and other black Marines endured.

In June 2011, seven Coast Guardsmen were convicted for tying down fellow crew members, forcing them to strip, coating them in foreign substances and calling them derogatory names. In some instances there was even inappropriate sexual contact.

In October 2011, Private Danny Chen was found dead apparently of a self-inflicted wound. According to his family, after his arrival in Afghanistan Chen was subjected to mistreatment by his fellow soldiers and his direct superiors almost on a daily basis. Chen was subjected to excessive sit-ups, push-ups, runs and sprints carrying sandbags, among other things, and that

rocks were thrown at him to simulate artillery. When the soldiers were putting up a tent, Chen was forced to wear a construction hat and give instructions in Chinese, even though none of the other soldiers spoke the language. He also was called racial slurs and was forced to work additional details.

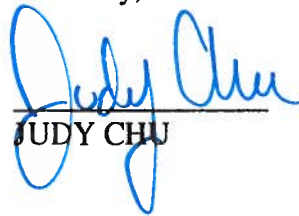
We are pleased that Defense Secretary Leon Panetta made a point of condemning hazing in his holiday message sent Dec. 23 to service members around the world. Secretary Panetta has also directed military commanders to "personally review" hazing policies and ensure compliance. This is an important step toward ensuring other service members do not suffer the same abuse and humiliation as Private Chen and Lance Corporal Lew.

However, in our own inquiries in military hazing policies, we were shocked to learn that some of the services do not keep track of the number of hazing incidents and they don't have policies in place to determine if their training and education about hazing is effective. While some services require new service members to undergo training about hazing during basic training, others do not. And it seems that there is no policy in place that prescribes a minimum appropriate response to hazing incidents to help correct a culture of hazing and prevent further incidents.

We believe that the Armed Services Committee has an important oversight role to play to ensure the services' policies are adequate and properly enforced. We request that you hold hearings on the subject of hazing in the military as soon as possible. We must protect our service members who have sacrificed so much for our country from unnecessary humiliation and abuse. Please contact Allison Rose at Allison.rose@mail.house.gov or 202-225-5464 with any questions.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you to protect our service members and prevent hazing.

Sincerely,


JUDY CHU


MIKE HONDA


NYDIA VELÁZQUEZ


BARBARA LEE


ZOE LOFGREN


JACKIE SPEIER


ENI FALEOMAEVAGA


AL GREEN


GREGORIO SABLÁN

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Hansen Clarke

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