

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

April 3, 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 Ranking Members Smith and Davis:

We greatly appreciate the support and attention the Armed Services Committee has paid to the issue of hazing and harassment in the military. Over the last year, we were shocked to learn about several high profile cases of hazing and racially based hazing abuse.

That is why, on March 6, 2012, Rep. Cummings, Senator Cardin and the Tri-Caucus, comprised of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) hosted a forum to examine military hazing. This forum, followed by your official hearing on March 22, 2012, entitled "Hazing in the Military," were the first critical steps to help determine what the Armed Services are doing to prevent hazing and harassment and how they can better protect our brave men and women from this damaging behavior.

Our men and women in uniform deserve to serve in a supportive environment as they put their lives on the line for our country. Hazing and harassment undermine the discipline that is fundamental to keeping America's military the best in the world.

We are pleased that Defense Secretary Leon Panetta made a point of condemning hazing in his holiday message sent December 23, 2011 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 service members do not suffer abuse and humiliation.

However, in light of the testimony at last week's hearing, we strongly believe that the military needs more tools at its disposal to hold perpetrators accountable. To maintain the trust of the American people, the military should make its efforts to combat hazing and harassment more transparent so Congress and concerned citizens can ensure that they are doing all they can to effectively prevent hazing. We remain concerned that many of the services do not track the number of hazing incidents, that those that have a tracking system do not analyze or use the data to improve their practices, that not every service has a policy expressly prohibiting hazing and that some services do not include specific anti-hazing curriculum in their training. We hope that you will work with us and each of the Armed Services to address these concerns in the coming months.

As you work on crafting the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013, we also ask that you include the following proposals in the legislation to help eradicate hazing in the Armed Services and ensure the military is held accountable for protecting all service members from hazing and harassment.

1) Create a Statutory Definition of Hazing in the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

In the hearing both the representatives from the Marine Corps and the Army expressed interest in creating a statutory definition of hazing in the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). They implied that this would make it easier for them to track these incidents. Currently 44 states have anti-hazing laws and 31 states define hazing as a crime in their criminal codes. We also believe that defining hazing in the UCMJ would provide a strong disincentive against hazing and would be an important tool that could be used to prosecute perpetrators of hazing.

2) Request a GAO Study on each of the Service's Hazing Training and Prevention Policies and the Prevalence and Consequences of Hazing Over the Last 5 Years.

Every branch of the Armed Services has different policies, training and procedures regarding hazing and harassment. Therefore, it is critical that Congress have a more thorough understanding and objective analysis of the prevalence of hazing in the military, the policies in place to prevent it, the effectiveness of the training in place, and the penalties imposed on the perpetrators of hazing.

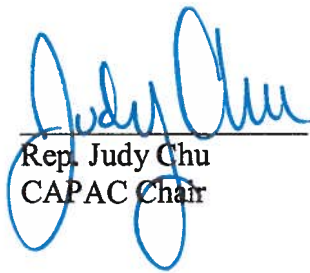
3) Institute a National Hazing Database that Tracks Incidents of Hazing and Require an Annual Report to Congress on the Military's Progress in Responding to Hazing.

Very few of the services track hazing incidents. Those that do track hazing incidents do not analyze the data to improve their prevention policies or training. To better understand the pervasiveness of hazing and harassment in the military, Congress should create a database of hazing incidents that includes the number of hazing allegations, the number of substantiated cases of hazing and the penalties imposed on the perpetrators, including Non-Judicial Punishment and Courts Martial. Additionally, the legislation should require an annual report to Congress on the hazing data collected, analyses of the data and the military's progress in responding to hazing.

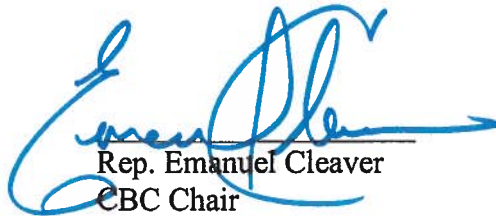
We hope that you will consider our requests and look forward to working closely with the Committee to combat hazing in the military and as you draft the FY2013 National Defense Authorization Act. Thank you for your dedication to our service members and consideration of our request.

We believe that the Armed Services Committee has an important oversight role to play to ensure the services' anti-hazing policies are adequate and properly enforced and greatly appreciate your commitment to prevent hazing in the military. Service members who have sacrificed so much for our country deserve to be protected from unnecessary humiliation and abuse. Please contact Allison Rose at Allison.rose@mail.house.gov or 202-225-5464 with any questions.

Sincerely,



Rep. Judy Chu
CAPAC Chair



Rep. Emanuel Cleaver
CBC Chair



Rep. Charles Gonzalez
CHC Chair



Rep. Mike Honda



Rep. Elijah Cummings



Rep. Nydia Velázquez