

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, D.C. 20515**

October 10, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

We write to express concern regarding your September 30, 2025, remarks at Marine Corps Base Quantico and subsequent policy memorandums calling for a “Review of Hazing, Bullying, and Harassment Definitions” and the “Implementation of Military Equal Opportunity and Equal Employment Opportunity Reform Plan.”<sup>1</sup>

In front of over 800 general and flag officers pulled from critical missions across the world, you announced sweeping changes to how the military handles allegations of hazing and other forms of abuse. This included authorizing drill instructors to “instill healthy fear” in recruits, “put their hands on recruits,” ransack rooms, and reinstate the outdated practice of “shark attacks,” where drill sergeants swarm and scream at enlistees during basic training.<sup>2</sup> Your subsequent memo also claims current Department of Defense (DOD) definitions of hazing, bullying, and harassment are “overly broad, jeopardizing combat readiness, mission accomplishment, and trust in the organization.”<sup>3</sup> These assertions contradict the Department’s own June 2025 Hazing and Bullying Prevention Response in the Military Service delivered to Congress, which states that such behavior weakens unit cohesion and jeopardizes mission success.<sup>4</sup>

We strongly urge DOD to retain the existing definitions and take steps to strengthen hazing prevention and reporting policies, rather than roll back these critical protections. All service members and recruits must be treated with dignity and respect. Weakening these protections will only worsen the existing problem of military hazing and endanger more lives.

Hazing incidents have already traumatized too many victims and claimed too many lives. Thomas Weaver, once a top-ranking recruit, had his military career cut short after being beaten and choked by drill instructors.<sup>5</sup> Lance Cpl. Ameer Bourmeche was thrown in a clothes dryer and

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<sup>1</sup> [Department of Defense: Secretary of War Announced Memorandums](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Department of Defense: Secretary of War Pete Hegseth FULL REMARKS at the WAR DEPARTMENT ADDRESS](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Department of Defense: Secretary of War Announced Memorandums](#)

<sup>4</sup> Department of Defense: Report to the Committees on Armed Services of the Senate and the House of Representatives on Hazing and Bullying Prevention Response in the Military Services (June 2025)

<sup>5</sup> [New York Times: Ex-Marine Describes Violent Hazing and the Lies That Covered It Up](#)

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walked like a dog with a belt around his neck by Gunnery Sgt. Joseph Felix.<sup>6</sup> Sgt. Phillip Roach was hit with a wooden mallet and suffered a seizure during a promotion ceremony “tradition.”<sup>7</sup> Hazing incidents have also led to unnecessary and tragic loss life. While serving on a special operations mission in Mali, Staff Sgt. Logan Melgar was strangled to death by two Navy SEALs to “teach the Green Beret a lesson” after they missed a French Embassy party.<sup>8</sup> After enduring harassment, racist remarks, and denial of medical care Marine recruit Raheel Siddiquis sprinted and jumped off of a roof in front of his fellow recruits and drill instructors.<sup>9</sup> He tragically passed at the hospital shortly thereafter. Lance Corporal Harry Lew was stationed in Afghanistan when peers berated him, stomped on his back, and poured the entire contents of a sandbag onto his face and in his mouth. Harry took his own life with his gun 22 minutes later at the age of 21.<sup>10</sup> Logan, Raheel, and Harry’s stories are not unique. Danny Chen, Brushaun Anderson, Hamson Daniels McPherson Jr., Jarrett Wright and countless other victims of hazing have been targeted because of race, sex, religion, sexual orientation, or just because they were different.

Hazing has long been a serious issue within the military. For example, a December 2021 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that DOD’s mandatory Congressional hazing reports did not contain complete information and “significantly understated the number of hazing incidents by potentially tens of thousands of incidents.”<sup>11</sup> The report also found that harassment prevention training had not been properly evaluated and that only 76 percent of Military Equal Opportunity (MEO) professional billets in DOD were filled by qualified professionals. For the Army National Guard and Army Reserve, these vacancy rates were even higher (55 percent and 45 percent, respectively).

Given the serious harm caused by hazing, we request answers to the following inquiries by November 7, 2025:

- 1) What is the purpose of redefining “hazing,” “bullying,” and “toxic leadership” given longstanding evidence that these behaviors weaken trust and readiness?
- 2) DOD has previously stated that hazing and bullying jeopardizes troop readiness, weakens trust within ranks, and harms the well-being of service members.<sup>12</sup> Has DOD reversed that position? If so, on what basis?

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<sup>6</sup> [New York Times Magazine: How the Death of a Muslim Recruit Revealed a Culture of Brutality in the Marines](#)

<sup>7</sup> [NBC News: Soldier who hit colleague with wooden mallet is disciplined](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Marine Corp Times: Navy SEAL wins appeal of sentence in soldier’s hazing death](#)

<sup>9</sup> [New York Times: How the Death of a Muslim Recruit Revealed a Culture of Brutality in the Marines](#)

<sup>10</sup> [CNN: Marine pleads guilty in hazing-suicide case, gets 30-day sentence](#)

<sup>11</sup> [GAO-22-104066: MILITARY HAZING: DOD Should Address Data Reporting Deficiencies, Training Limitations, and Personnel Shortfalls](#)

<sup>12</sup> Department of Defense: Report to the Committees on Armed Services of the Senate and the House of Representatives on Hazing and Bullying Prevention Response in the Military Services (June 2025)

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- 3) In your speech, you stated that drill instructors would be permitted to “put their hands on recruits.”<sup>13</sup> Please define what this mean and how these actions will be regulated.
  - a. What exactly does this mean? Does it authorize physical punishment, and if so, under what conditions?
  - b. What oversight mechanism will be in place to ensure that recruits are not subject to harassment, harm, or physical assault?
  - c. Would the events endured by recruits Thomas Weaver, Ameer Bourmeche, and Raheel Siddiquis fall within the scope of “permitted” conduct under your policy?
- 4) Congress requires DOD to provide comprehensive reports on hazing and bullying under Section 549L of the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act.
  - a. How will narrowing definitions impact what incidents must be reported to Congress?
  - b. Will fewer cases now be classified as hazing and therefore excluded from mandatory reporting?
  - c. Which offices and officials will be accountable for ensuring accurate reporting if these changes are adopted?
- 5) The GAO found that DOD's reports to Congress lacked complete information and significantly undercounted hazing incidents. The GAO also highlighted significant challenges faced by the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) and MEO officials.
  - a. What immediate steps will DOD take to ensure hazing incidents are no longer undercounted?
  - b. How will narrowing definitions avoid worsening this undercount?
  - c. What resources and staffing increases will you commit to DEOMI and MEO to fix the gaps GAO identified?

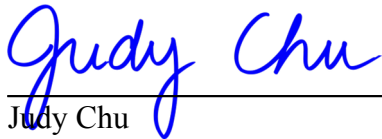
We demand clear and comprehensive answers as to how DOD will implement these memos and clarifying of your remarks. DOD must reaffirm its commitment to prevent hazing and abuse, maintaining strong accountability measures, and fostering a culture of respect. Upholding the dignity of every service member is essential to fostering trust, discipline, and mission success. We look forward to your timely and detailed response by November 7, 2025.

Sincerely,

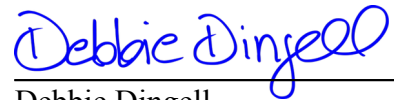
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<sup>13</sup> [Department of Defense: Secretary of War Pete Hegseth FULL REMARKS at the WAR DEPARTMENT ADDRESS](#)

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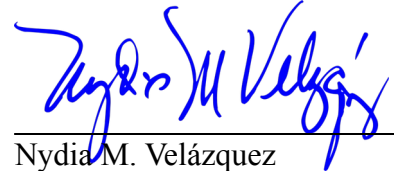
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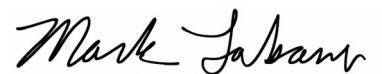
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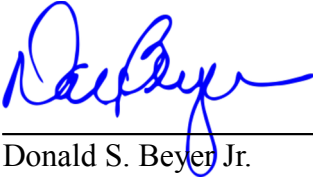


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Member of Congress

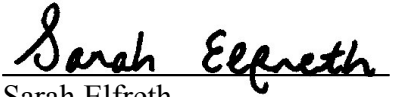


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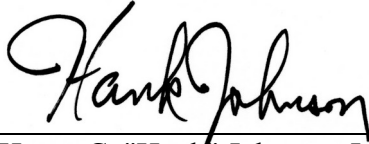
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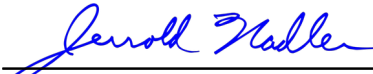
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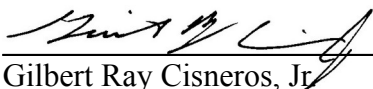
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