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

March 1, 2016

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Thornberry and Ranking Member Smith:

Next month will recognize the fifth anniversary of the death of my nephew, Harry Lew. Harry was determined to serve his country in any way he could. He enlisted in the Marine Corps and deployed to Afghanistan in 2011. My family beamed with pride. We never could have imagined the tragedy that would ensue.

While in Afghanistan, he was the victim of military hazing. In the middle of the night, his fellow Marines took it upon themselves to administer so-called "corrective training" for almost four hours. They tormented, abused and degraded him. They forced him to perform useless, unnecessary exercises while he was clad in his full body armor, carrying a 25-pound sandbag. After they kicked, punched, and stomped on his back, they nearly smothered him with the contents of the sandbag. Twenty-two minutes after this torture, Harry took his own life, and my family was forever changed.

Yet, Harry was not the only one. Over the years, I have heard stories of other servicemembers who also experienced hazing so arduous it led to their deaths. Private Danny Chen also served in Afghanistan in 2011. He was a victim of racially-based hazing. Like Harry, Danny took his own life.

I have made it my mission to end hazing in our armed services because it is unacceptable and indefensible. I worked to secure reports from the military branches in the 2013 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The reports revealed the overall lack of reliable information and data on hazing, including serious deficiencies in the tracking and treatment of hazing by the Department of Defense (DOD).

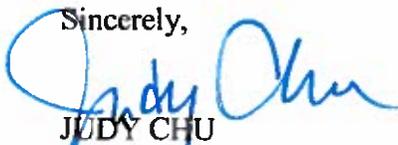
Therefore, I urged the committee to include language for a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on the current status of hazing in the military in the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act. With your assistance, this language was included and Congress received this report last month. Today, we have an independent analysis that found that DOD anti-hazing policy is not being implemented, training is unclear, and tracking systems are highly divergent and underdeveloped.

More specifically, we learned that DOD is not aware of the extent to which the department's hazing policies have been implemented. In December 2015, DOD released an updated policy memorandum on hazing, but as GAO indicates, it does not go far enough to ensure that their policies are being implemented consistently and thoroughly. GAO underscored the need to better define hazing in order to teach servicemembers how to identify it. It emphasized the need to vastly improve the military services' tracking mechanisms, which are incomplete and inconsistent, preventing us from having the reliable data that would help determine root causes and propose real solutions. Lastly, the GAO indicates that the DOD has not evaluated the prevalence of hazing in a meaningful way.

Given these objective findings, I request that as the House Armed Services Committee prepares the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, language is included to 1) require DOD to submit an annual report to Congress to ensure anti-hazing policies are implemented consistently; 2) require DOD to improve existing training to help servicemembers better identify and respond to hazing at all command levels; 3) mandate that DOD issue a department-wide guidance on a comprehensive and consistent data collection system that includes information on protected classes such as race and religion; and 4) evaluate the prevalence of hazing through department-wide surveys. Only when we have these changes in place can we truly begin to eliminate hazing in the military.

Thank you Chairman Thornberry and Ranking Member Smith for allowing me to discuss my legislative priorities for the 2017 NDAA. I urge Congress take action to eradicate hazing in the military.

Sincerely,



JUDY CHU
Member of Congress