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Congress of the United States
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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

SUBCOMMITTEES:
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GOVERNMENT REFORM

SUBCOMMITTEES:
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GOVERNMENT SPENDING
TARP, FINANCIAL SERVICES AND
BAILOUTS OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PROGRAMS
TECHNOLOGY, INFORMATION POLICY, AND
PROCUREMENT REFORM

August 3, 2012

Dr. Joseph Westphal
Under Secretary of the U.S. Army
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington DC 20301-1400

Dr. Jamie M. Moran
Acting Under Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

Dear Dr. Westphal and Dr. Moran:

As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I have a constitutional duty to conduct oversight over key Department of Defense and sexual assault in the military. One of the key aspects of this oversight has been the services' ability to respond to victims, which has largely failed due to rampant underreporting. Victims are often afraid to report wrongdoing, since they know that coming forward is more likely to end their own career than result in the punishment in the perpetrator. It is imperative that Congress hold the military accountable to address credible reports of wrongdoing immediately so that justice is swiftly and appropriately rendered. I am writing to request your help in continuing to ensure that the military has the tools to facilitate and encourage reports of wrongdoing.

The events at Lackland Air Force Base have exposed yet again that our military has failed to identify and help victims in anything approaching real time. The widespread sexual misconduct at Lackland began in 2009, but the first victim did not come forward until last year. Relying upon the chain of command, even that victim's report to her former boot camp instructor took a month to reach the squadron commander. Prior to this scandal, I have been told other victims at Lackland—going as far back as eight years—were dismissed as “he said-she said” controversies. As the prosecutions and investigations continue to unfold, we are still learning the scope of the misconduct, and we may never know how many victims attempted to report their exploitation.

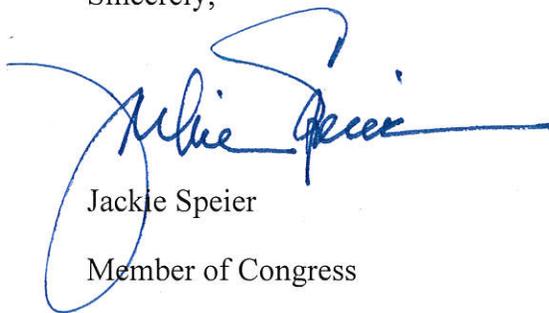
One of the key components for identifying and aiding these victims are providing them with the resources they need to report misconduct. At the frontline of these resources are 24/7 hotlines, staffed by personnel who can facilitate restricted reporting, and connect victims with Victim Advocates or Sexual Assault Response Coordinators. Unfortunately, these calls are not always properly handled, and consequently victims may not receive proper attention and guidance, and they may be discouraged from reporting an incident. Part of achieving Defense Secretary

Panetta's objective of zero-tolerance for sexual misconduct requires properly staffing and handling these calls.

The Under Secretary of the Navy and the Naval Audit Service have demonstrated that a commitment to monitoring these hotlines can make a significant difference. When the Naval Audit Service first began its audit of these hotlines, they found that their hotlines were in abysmal shape. The first audit report found that 52 percent of the calls placed by their auditors failed. Their next audit, issued in January 2011, found 44 percent of the calls failed. Three additional audits found these numbers were still decreasing, with the latest report issued last month finding only 11 percent of these phone calls failed or were otherwise mishandled. The Navy must work to get this number down to zero, but I applaud them for their vigilant oversight of this issue and the progress they are making to ensure that the calls of victims that are brave enough to seek help are handled properly. Additionally, these reports have helped some Navy and Marine Corps components decide to eliminate and reduce multiple and non-working numbers that only add to victim's confusion when they are seeking help. These oversight efforts have also brought the Navy and Marine Corps into 100 percent compliance with posting of phone numbers.

Unfortunately, we have yet to see the same kind of vigilant efforts from the Air Force or the Army, and have yet to see a publicly available audit of sexual assault hotlines for those personnel. As part of your commitment to our troops and eradicating sexual assault in the military, I would ask you to have the Air Force and Army IGs audit your services' hotlines to identify potential weaknesses and improvements necessary to make these hotlines shelters, rather than black holes, for victims.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jackie Speier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and a long horizontal stroke at the end. It is positioned above the printed name and title.

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

CC: Robert O. Work, Under Secretary of the Navy