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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

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

June 18, 2012

The Honorable Buck McKeon, Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2120 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith, Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2120 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman McKeon and Ranking Member Smith:

Recently, a San Antonio newspaper began reporting on a scandal at Lackland Air Force base that is growing by the day. So far at least four Air Force instructors have been charged with sexual misconduct with at least 24 trainees. The Air Force has also temporarily or permanently removed 31 out of the 375 instructors based at Lackland for unprofessional conduct since last summer, including an unknown number for sexual misconduct. The Air Force has conceded that this case is the biggest of its kind ever at Lackland.

What is happening at Lackland is systemic and warrants this committee's immediate attention.

Most of the allegations and charges are of instructors assaulting or having inappropriate sexual relationships with their trainees. Two of the women that have come forward were called over an intercom two days after they graduated from basic training last fall and asked to leave their dorm to meet their instructors. From the day they entered the military they had been trained – and required – to follow the orders of their instructors. Both women said failure to follow orders could cause them to be retained in basic training under the very instructors that assaulted them.

Staff Sergeant Luis Walker, a military instructor, has been charged with having sexual contact with 10 women including sodomy and rape in technical and basic training.

Staff Sergeant Peter Vega-Maldonado has admitted in a plea bargain to having sex with one woman. His punishment is 90 days in jail, 30 days of hard labor, reduction in rank and forfeiture \$500 a month in pay for four months. He will be forced to leave the Air Force – but without a bad-conduct discharge.

After striking this deal with prosecutors, Vega testified that he actually had improper contact with 10 trainees. Staff Sergeant Peter Vega-Maldonado is not immune to further prosecution, but his admission of guilt cannot be used against him in future procedures. Each victim will have to come forward, and the prosecution will have to start from scratch.

The fact that these assaults were widespread and took place over many months flies in the face of the “zero tolerance” policy touted by our military leaders.

The United States Military is the finest in the world, and the men and women who serve America in uniform are truly the definition of courage and honor.

In light of the alarming trend of sexual assault cases documented in the military as a whole, it is imperative that Congress hold the military accountable and truly implement a zero-tolerance policy in response to this problem, and address credible reports of wrongdoing immediately so that justice is swiftly and appropriately rendered.

This issue clearly warrants an investigation by this Committee. Holding a hearing on Lackland will demonstrate the committee’s commitment to this issue, allow the military to bring to the committee their concerns with this problem and efforts to fight it, and give voice to the victims.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter, and I look forward to working with you to address this crisis.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jackie Speier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress