

April 26, 2016

Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
House Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Letter of Support for Congresswoman Speier's Military Hazing and Bullying Amendments

Dear Chairman Thornberry and Ranking Member Smith:

On behalf of to the undersigned organizations, we write to show our support for Congresswoman Jackie Speier's amendment to the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), based on the Harry Lew Military Hazing Accountability and Prevention Act, introduced by Congresswoman Judy Chu on April 26, 2016.

Since the deaths of Chinese Americans Private Danny Chen and Lance Corporal Harry Lew due to hazing and bullying in 2011, Congresswoman Judy Chu (CA-27), along with many of the undersigned organizational partners have worked closely with the Department of Defense (DOD) to combat hazing and bullying in the armed forces. We have worked to reform the culture of racialized hazing, bullying, and harassment that contributed to the death of Private Danny Chen. We now know that the contributing factors to Chen's fatal, self-inflicted wound was bullying, as defined by the Army in their 2013 hazing report and in the recent DOD memorandum on hazing. Private Chen endured continued harassment and racialized bullying, including the usage of racial slurs such as "gook", "chink", and "dragon lady". Chen was 19 when he died. Eight of his superiors were eventually tried and charged in his case. As a country that depends on the volunteer enrollment of servicemembers, it is critical that we protect their wellbeing within their own units.

Hazing and bullying cannot be addressed in isolation. As we have seen with Private Chen and other victims of hazing and bullying from minority communities, there remains a compelling need to discuss the issues within the context of race, color, national origin, and the other categories defined within the military EO basis of discrimination. As the number of active duty and reserve minority service members increase and changes in policies allow

Although the DOD have made great strides to increase oversight, training, and data collection on hazing and bullying, particularly in their most recent memorandum on hazing and bullying, we remained concerned that the policy does not provide enough guidance nor accountability needed to ensure full and consistent implementation of training and data collection. As stated in the U.S. Government Accountability Office's February 2016 report on hazing in the DOD and Coast Guard, the different branches still employ vastly different methods of data collection and have yet to evaluate the prevalence of hazing in the DOD. Additionally, the issued memo's data collection mandate only includes two of the six classes categorized under the military equal opportunity basis of discrimination.

Congresswoman Speier's amendment, based on Congresswoman Chu's bill, includes vital recommendations based on the GAO report that will improve upon the DOD memo and ensure full and consistent implementation of the policy. Congress has the ability and responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of all individuals who serve in the armed forces. When individuals from our communities enlist to protect our country, we must honor their service through every possible measure to ensure their well-being during their period of duty. We urge you to support the amendment and consider the detrimental impacts hazing and bullying in the military have on morale, the health of troops, and their ability to keep our country safe and support Congresswoman Speier's amendment.

Sincerely,

Anti-Defamation League
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance
Asian American Psychological Association
Japanese American Citizens League
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA)
National Korean American Service and Education Consortium
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance
Pan-Pacific American Leaders and Mentors
OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates
The Center for APA Women