Congress of the United States Washington, DC 20515

March 14, 2017

The Honorable James N. Mattis Secretary Department of Defense 1000 Defense Pentagon Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Mattis,

We write to you regarding the disturbing reports of sexual harassment and dishonorable conduct by United States Marines on the Facebook group "Marines United." As reported by the *Center of Investigative Reporting*, "Marines United" has thousands of followers and is populated with photographs of active-duty and veteran women. Some of these photos are themselves obscene; nearly all of the photos are accompanied by scores of obscene comments from male Marines. As of January 30, 2017, the *Center for Investigative Reporting* found more than a dozen women were identified by their full name, rank, and military duty station in photographs posted by some members of this group.

This conduct is wholly unacceptable and disgusting. It is blatant sexual harassment and, by admission of officials within the Department of Defense, it puts these women at risk of blackmail – sexual or otherwise – and jeopardizes our national security. Further, this incident punctuates the need for greater reform by the military services. Recent reports have uncovered additional internet message boards populated with similarly obscene photographs and comments, and run by service members across other branches. Although the anonymous nature of these message boards means it is unclear who these service members maybe, if they are service members at all, it makes us additionally concerned that these issues are not isolated to either a few service members or to the Marine Corps.

This incident is deeply disappointing – the United States Marine Corps is renowned as one of the best military services in the world. The gallantry and hard work of the men and women that call themselves United States Marines is impressive and the nation is grateful. However, with that renown and gratitude, we expect much more from the service.

Reportedly, the Marine Corps and the Department of the Navy have taken corrective action to include: the shutdown of the Facebook accounts associated with the photos, discharge from active-duty of at least one Marine, and the initiation of a formal investigation by the Naval

Criminal Investigative Service. While these are important first steps, it is clearly not sufficient to address this issue – more than two weeks after certain Facebook accounts were deactivated, more photos of women were posted to this group.

We request that the Department of Defense consider further action that it would deem appropriate to correct this issue. We also request an update to the investigation conducted by NCIS and a detailed explanation of actions taken to date by the Marine Corps, Navy, and DoD, including any support services and counseling offered to the affected women. Lastly, we request DoD to ensure lesson learned for its investigations to this issue are appropriately applied across the Department.

Given the testimony by Marine Corps Commandant General Neller and yourself before Congress, we know you consider sexual harassment and assault to be a serious and persistent issue with the services. It leaves men and women vulnerable to retaliation and violence. Our continued operations in the Global War on Terror and against organizations like Islamic State mean men and women are at greater risk of suffering the psychological wounds of combat. The least we can do is ensure that they are not sexually traumatized by their brothers-in-arms.

As a retired and highly decorated Marine general, we know you take the motto *semper fidelis* to heart. We know you will ensure swift justice is served and that the finest traditions of the United States naval service are upheld.

Sincerely,

Ann McLane Kuster

Member of Congress

Jackie Walorski Member of Congress

Lois Frankel

Member of Congress

Julia Brownley

Member of Congress

Katherine Clark

Member of Congress

Ruben Gallego

Member of Congress

Cher Bustos

Cheri Bustos Member of Congress

Tim Walz

Member of Congress

Beto O'Rourke.

Beto O'Rourke Member of Congress

Jackie Speier

Member of Congress

Mark Takano

Member of Congress