

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2106

October 26, 2011

The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Panetta:

I write to express my deep concern regarding the findings of the recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on sexual assault in the military and respectfully request increased, concerted high-level attention be given to this issue. The report, entitled, "Preventing Sexual Harassment: DOD Needs Greater Leadership Commitment and an Oversight Framework," (GAO-11-809), describes the Department of Defense's (DOD's) continued ambivalence toward this critical issue. The DOD's efforts to date have been inadequate.

In July 2008, as Chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs and Homeland Security, I held the first of four hearings on sexual assault in the military. In my opening statement, I noted that "there sometimes appears a lack of urgency, leadership, and resources to transform these statements into reality." Although some progress has been made in this area, the GAO report makes clear that more must be done, faster.

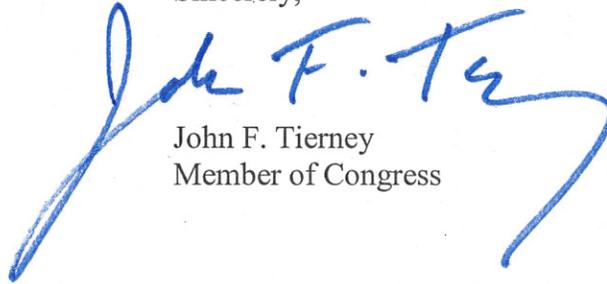
The ongoing lack of oversight and the continued underreporting of incidents of sexual assault are troublesome. GAO found that DOD still lacks an oversight framework including clear goals, objectives, milestones, and metrics for measuring progress. In addition, GAO's survey found that, of 82 service members that indicated they had been harassed sexually during the preceding 12 months, only 4 stated that they had reported the incident formally. The most common reasons for the lack of reporting were found to be that the incident was not sufficiently serious to report or that the incident would not be taken seriously if reported.

It is not enough to pay lip-service to reform on an issue as gravely important as the basic rights of our women and men in uniform. At a hearing before the House Armed Services Committee on October 13, 2011, you pledged to fund new initiatives aimed at preventing sexual assault in our armed forces regardless of the state of the DOD budget. You indicated that you are paying "a lot of attention" to this issue. I hope to see

immediate action from you and other leaders at DOD to ensure that members of our armed services feel safe from harassment at their workplace and that those committing harassment are held responsible.

I respectfully request that you submit to me your plan to implement an oversight framework for improving reporting and processing of incidents of sexual abuse; your goals, objectives and tactics for reducing such incidents; and your metrics for measuring progress in these efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John F. Tierney". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

John F. Tierney
Member of Congress