

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

October 13, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth  
Secretary of Defense  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

We are writing to express our deep alarm at your recent remarks and actions targeting women in the military. This includes your speech at Quantico stating that combat troops must meet “the highest male standard” - even if this comes at the expense of losing qualified service women - and your termination of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS).

Women have sacrificed their safety and, at times, their lives, for our country and we are deeply alarmed by this Administration’s attempts to attack their merits. We also oppose dismantling any resources that support their well-being and equal treatment. Any suggestion that women are unqualified, either in body or spirit, is a profound insult to the service women who have contributed so much to our country.

During your nomination hearing, you made a promise to Congress that you would respect women service members and support their participation in all roles in the military, despite concerning statements that you have made in the past including your opposition to women in combat roles.<sup>1</sup> Yet your remarks on Tuesday have demonstrated the opposite. You imply throughout your speech that women are getting special treatment and cannot meet physical fitness standards, even though women have already passed strenuous physical and mental testing that is gender-neutral to qualify for some of the most rigorous roles in our military. Your actions have also made it clear you have no desire to support victims of discrimination, hazing or bullying. This is evidenced by your recent memos that will weaken definitions of hazing and bullying and make it more challenging to bring discrimination and harassment complaints.<sup>2</sup> Rates of discrimination, hazing, and bullying are prevalent in the military for both men and women, but women experience these unwanted behaviors at significantly higher rates. These

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<sup>1</sup> Chan, Melissa. “Pete Hegseth’s Remarks about Women in Combat Are Met with Disgust and Dissent.” *NBCNews.Com*, NBCUniversal News Group, 15 Nov. 2024, [www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/pete-hegseths-remarks-women-combat-are-met-disgust-dissent-rcna180136](http://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/pete-hegseths-remarks-women-combat-are-met-disgust-dissent-rcna180136).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g. “Implementation of Military Equal Opportunity and Equal Employment Opportunity Reform Plan” and “Restoring Good Order and Discipline Through Balanced Accountability.”

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issues are known to affect readiness and can lead to severe health and career consequences for service members, thereby disproportionately impacting women who serve.<sup>3</sup>

For almost 75 years, DACOWITS has played a critical role in supporting our military's strength and readiness and our national security by providing "advice and recommendations on matters and policies relating to the recruitment, retention, employment, integration, well-being, and treatment of servicewomen in the Armed

Forces."<sup>4</sup> In a social media post, you explained the elimination of DACOWITS was [g]ender neutral, color blind, merit based"<sup>5</sup> and your Department has accused the committee of "advancing a divisive feminist agenda."<sup>6</sup> This accusation could not be further from the truth. DACOWITS' role is to support the readiness and strength of our military and to ensure that the best service members are recruited and able to serve at the highest standards. Its recommendations have been essential in ensuring women troops have properly fitting combat gear, appropriate health care, and hundreds of other facets of military readiness and efficiency. Many of the recommendations, such as those addressing parental leave, benefit all service members by supporting overall military recruitment and retention. DACOWITS' recommendations—approximately ninety-four percent (94%) of which have been either fully or partially adopted by the Department<sup>7</sup> — are grounded in research, data, and direct engagement with male and female service members, ensuring that its recommendations are well-informed and meaningful.

DACOWITS has played a critically important role in fulfilling your stated goal of a merit based system by breaking down barriers to ensure opportunities for the most qualified individuals to serve our country. Our military must be a place that enables our service members, of every gender, race, and faith, to serve with dignity and bring their full talents to bear.

Due to these concerns, we request for the immediate reinstatement of DACOWITS. If no change is made by October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025, we request an in-person Member-level briefing from your office no later than November 6th, 2025, to learn more about your rationale and evidence behind eliminating such a critical committee. Be prepared to discuss and provide in writing your plans to support all service members to increase the effectiveness of the Armed Forces. This discussion

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<sup>3</sup> [Gender Differences in Health Among U.S. Service Members: Unwanted Gender-Based Experiences as an Explanatory Factor - PMC](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services \(DACOWITS\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> Pete Hegseth on X: "Gender neutral, color blind, merit based." / X

<sup>6</sup> [Kingsley Wilson on X: " 🚨 BREAKING: Secretary Hegseth has decided to terminate the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. The Committee is focused on advancing a divisive feminist agenda that hurts combat readiness, while Secretary Hegseth has focused on advancing uniform, sex-neutral" / X](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services \(DACOWITS\)](#)

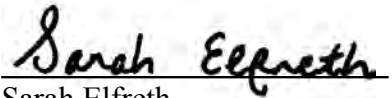
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will include your explanation of specific physical requirements for general fitness and certain occupations. We also continue to await your responses to the questions we submitted in our May 13, 2025 letter.

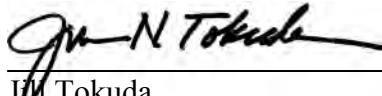
Sincerely,



Chrissy Houlahan  
Ranking Member  
House Armed Services  
Committee  
Subcommittee on Military  
Personnel



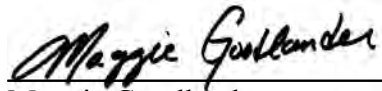
Sarah Elfreth  
Member of Congress



JM Tokuda  
Member of Congress



Joe Courtney  
Member of Congress



Maggie Goodlander  
Member of the Democratic  
Women's Caucus  
Member of Congress



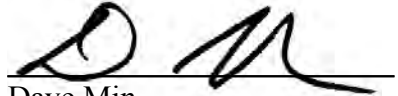
Steven Horsford  
Member of Congress

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Scott H. Peters  
Member of Congress



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Dave Min  
Member of Congress



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Kevin Mullin  
Member of Congress



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Rashida Tlaib  
Member of Congress



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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



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Paul D. Tonko  
Member of Congress



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Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress



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Lucy McBath  
Member of Congress



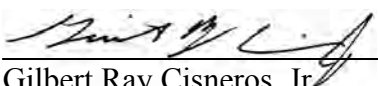
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Marilyn Strickland  
Member of Congress



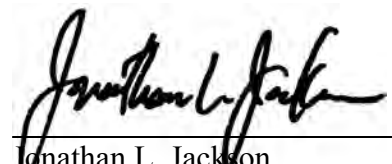
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Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress



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Gilbert Ray Cisneros, Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Jonathan L. Jackson  
Member of Congress

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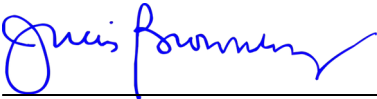
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Jason Crow  
Member of Congress



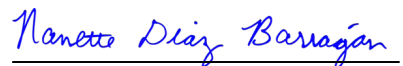
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Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress



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Nanette Diaz Barragán  
Member of Congress



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Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress



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Frederica S. Wilson  
Member of Congress



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Bradley Scott Schneider  
Member of Congress



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John Garamendi  
Member of Congress



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Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress



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Salud Carbajal  
Member of Congress

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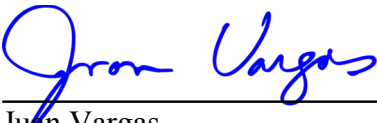
Sara Jacobs  
Co-Chair

Member Services Task Force  
Democratic Women's Caucus



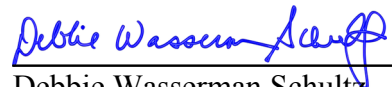
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Diana DeGette  
Member of Congress



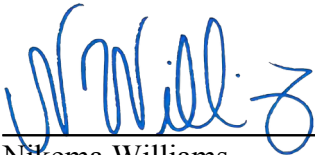
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Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress



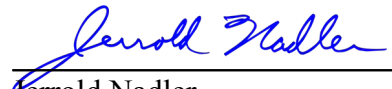
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Debbie Wasserman Schultz  
Member of Congress



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Nikema Williams  
Member of Congress



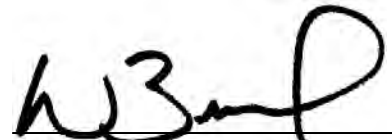
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Jerrold Nadler  
Member of Congress



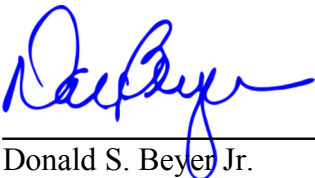
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Eric Sorensen  
Member of Congress



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Wesley Bell  
Member of Congress



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Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Doris Matsui  
Member of Congress

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*Ed Case*

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Ed Case  
Member of Congress

*Eric Swalwell*

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Eric Swalwell  
Member of Congress

*Kelly Morrison*

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Kelly Morrison  
Member of Congress

*Kathy Castor*

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Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress

*Dan Goldman*

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Dan Goldman  
Member of Congress

*Mark Takano*

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MARK TAKANO  
Member of Congress

*Julie Johnson*

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Julie Johnson  
Member of Congress

*Lois Frankel*

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Lois Frankel  
Member of Congress

*Brittany Pettersen*

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Brittany Pettersen  
Member of Congress

*Teresa Leger Fernandez*

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Teresa Leger Fernández  
Member of Congress

*Mary Gay Scanlon*

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Mary Gay Scanlon  
Member of Congress

*Mike Quigley*

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Mike Quigley  
Member of Congress

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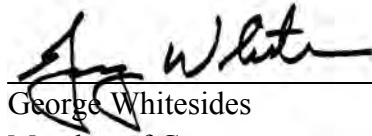
Judy Chu  
Member of Congress



Chris Deluzio  
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress



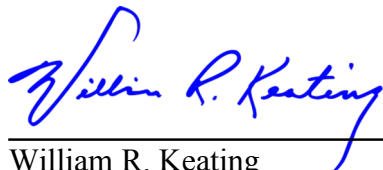
George Whitesides  
Member of Congress



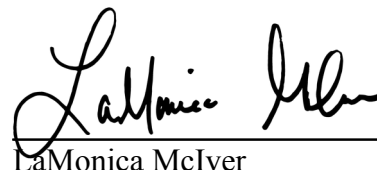
Emanuel Cleaver, II  
Member of Congress



Mark DeSaulnier  
Member of Congress



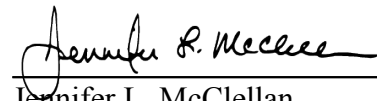
William R. Keating  
Member of Congress



LaMonica McIver  
Member of Congress



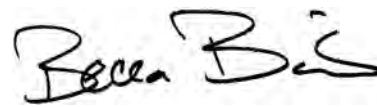
Val Hoyle  
Member of Congress



Jennifer L. McClellan  
Member of Congress



Derek T. Tran  
Member of Congress



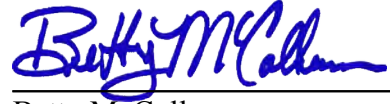
Becca Balint  
Member of Congress



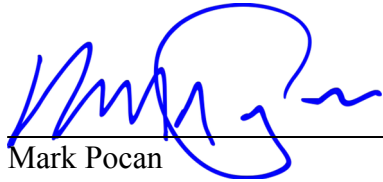
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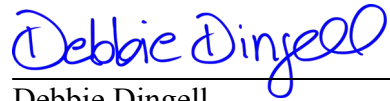
Delia C. Ramirez  
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum  
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress



Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress



Terri A. Sewell  
Member of Congress



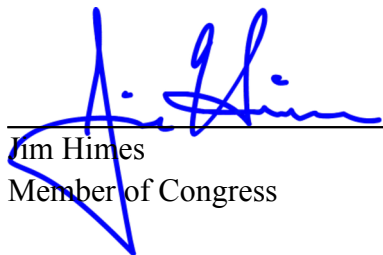
Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress



Nancy Pelosi  
Member of Congress



Deborah K. Ross  
Member of Congress



Jim Himes  
Member of Congress



Ayanna Pressley  
Member of Congress

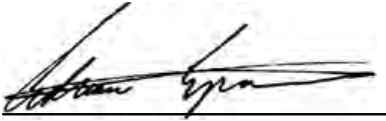


Mikie Sherrill  
Member of Congress

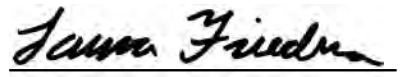


Shontel M. Brown  
Member of Congress

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Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress



Laura Friedman  
Member of Congress



Sylvia R. Garcia  
Member of Congress



Dina Titus  
Member of Congress



Veronica Escobar  
Member of Congress



Zoe Lofgren  
Member of Congress



Greg Stanton  
Member of Congress



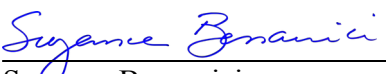
Bill Foster  
Member of Congress



Andrea Salinas  
Member of Congress



Lizzie Fletcher  
Member of Congress

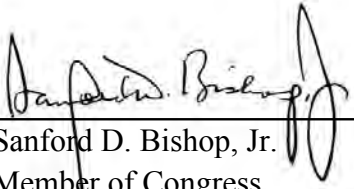


Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress




Donald Norcross  
Member of Congress

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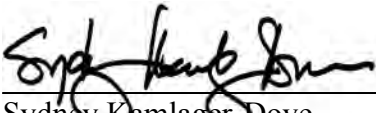
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Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.  
Member of Congress



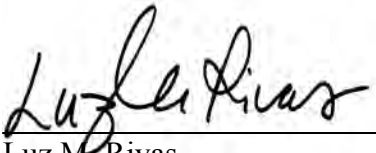
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Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Member of Congress



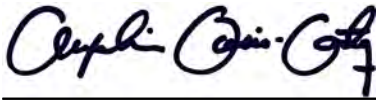
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Sydney Kamlager Dove  
Member of Congress




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Luz M. Rivas  
Member of Congress



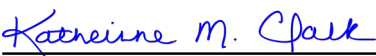
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Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  
Member of Congress



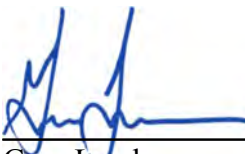
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Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress



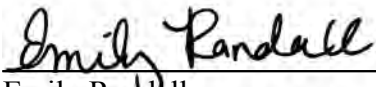
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Katherine M. Clark  
Member of Congress



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Greg Landsman  
Member of Congress



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Emily Randall  
Member of Congress