

United States Senate

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March 17, 2017

The Honorable James N. Mattis
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Mattis:

I am concerned by recent press reports that some Marines have posted naked and compromising photos of their fellow service members on social media without their consent. According to press reports, members of a Facebook group titled "Marines United," which appears to be primarily made up of more than 30,000 active duty and former Marines, posted photos of female Marines in various states of undress, while other members of the group added harassing or offensive comments to accompany the photos. It appears that in some cases members of the group specifically identified the women by name, rank, and military unit. One Marine, whose photos appeared multiple times on the "Marines United" page without her consent, said, "Even if I could, I'm never reenlisting...Being sexually harassed online ruined the Marine Corps for me, and the experience."

The allegations are disturbing, and if true, represent instances of blatant sexual harassment that degrades and demeans women service members, undermines unit cohesion, and is inconsistent with the core values of the Marine Corps. Perhaps most concerning are reports that such harassment is not an isolated incident. These latest allegations, which are reminiscent of a similar incident that occurred in 2013, in which a Facebook page featured hundreds of comments demeaning Marine Corps women, suggest that more must be done to ensure a culture within the military that does not condone or tolerate this sort of behavior toward women service members.

In your written testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee prior to your confirmation, you assured the committee that "sexual assault and harassment in the military is not acceptable." I appreciate your commitment to ensuring that such behavior is not tolerated.

I understand that the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) is investigating this incident, which is an important step towards ensuring any active-duty Marine who engaged in criminal activity, or who violated Marine Corps standards of conduct, is disciplined as appropriate. Just as important, however, is ensuring that the Department of Defense helps to foster an environment of zero-tolerance for this sort of behavior.

Please provide me with regular status updates on the conduct of the current NCIS investigation, as well as a list of actions the Department and Marine Corps will take to protect the victims of this online community and ensure the culture of our military will not condone this sort of behavior again. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

Cc: USMC Commandant Gen. Robert B. Neller