Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 11, 2018

The Honorable James Mattis
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Mattis:

We write today to ask for additional details about the recommendations you provided to the President in a Memorandum dated February 22, 2018, regarding military service by transgender individuals. We were surprised and disappointed by the recommendations contained in that memorandum. In our view, these recommendations contradict previous findings from the Department of Defense (DOD) and the professional medical community. As the President has empowered you to implement appropriate policies governing service by transgender individuals, we feel it imperative that we explore the factual bases behind your recommendations.

Your letter to the President stated you created a Panel of Experts of senior uniformed and civilian Defense Department leaders and charged them to provide their best military advice without regard to any external factors. Although you state that the panel received input from civilian medical professionals, the recommendations appear to us to be inconsistent with what we have heard from the civilian medical community. Numerous recognized experts, former military officials and Surgeons General, and organizations representing medical professionals have released statements criticizing the Report's recommendations and the underlying scientific basis for these recommendations.

Relying on recognized experts and gathering diverse opinions and perspectives is crucial to the development of an informed and sound policy. Given the discrepancies between the Report's recommendations and assessments of transgender military service previously made by DOD, and given the concerns raised by outside medical professionals and former military leaders, we would like to better understand the process by which DOD developed the Report. Specifically, we would like to know:

1. Who was on the Panel of Experts?
2. Who did the Panel consult with?
3. Did the Panel consult with the American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, or American Medical Association or any other medical professionals with expertise in gender dysphoria?
4. In your view, what are the substantial risks associated with the accessions and retention of transgender persons? Can you please provide any examples that since June 30, 2016 these issues have arisen within the military and describe how the DOD or services handled these situations?
5. In your view, what are the specific issues that could undermine readiness, disrupt unit cohesion, and impose an unreasonable burden on the military? Can you please provide any examples that since June 30, 2016 these issues have arisen within the military and describe how the DOD or services handled these situations?
6. Were any government officials outside of DOD or the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) involved in the Report or your Memorandum to the President? If so, who were these officials and what was the basis for their involvement?

Finally, please provide the specific medical and scientific data that supported the conclusions contained in your memorandum.

There are currently thousands of transgender individuals openly serving in the military with bravery and distinction. There has been no indication that this has had an impact on overall readiness. All individuals who are willing and qualified should be able to volunteer to serve, regardless of their gender identity. Since the wars began, the military services have appropriately moved away from identity-based service standards (including restrictions concerning sexual preference and gender) and have opted instead to rely on performance-based metrics; if you can do the job, you can compete for the job. Your policy recommendations, if implemented, would reverse this progress. Moreover, any ban on capable individuals serving in our military only shrinks the pool of available recruits and denies our military access to the skills, expertise, and experience of qualified servicemembers and talented recruits.

We appreciate you giving due consideration to our questions and concerns and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter with you.

Sincerely,

Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee

Kirsten Gillibrand
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Subcommittee
on Personnel

Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee

Jackie Speier
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Subcommittee
on Military Personnel