

# Military Culture Coalition

The Honorable John McCain  
Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee  
228 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

May 20, 2015

## **Subject: Oversight Needed on Policies Harmful to Women and Combat Effectiveness**

Dear Senator McCain:

We are writing to express concern about unprecedented Defense Department policy changes that would make women eligible for assignment to direct ground combat units, such as the infantry, on the same involuntary basis as men.

Plans for implementation are advancing toward a January 2016 deadline, without congressional oversight, even though extensive research and tests since 2012 have yet to produce any findings or empirical data that support the case for women in direct ground combat.

In contrast, many authoritative reports and studies have produced strong evidence that ordering women to serve in the infantry or Special Operations Forces would escalate physical injuries and erode mission capabilities, due to physiological differences that will not change.

These professional reports include results of U.S. Marine Corps proxy strength tests conducted in 2013. The Center for Military Readiness analyzed these results in their October 2014 [Interim CMR Special Report](#). [Exhibit B](#) of the Interim CMR Special Report provides a four-page list of titles, excerpts, and links to more than a dozen comprehensive studies and reports on this subject, not counting a recent one released by the British Ministry of Defence last December.

The British report confirmed that female injuries would be even greater when ground combat load carriage requirements exceed body weight capabilities. Personnel losses due to injury affect the mission capabilities of entire units – especially those that deploy to remote combat zones with orders to seek out and destroy the enemy with deliberate offensive action on land.

[The British report](#) stated that deficiencies in strength and endurance lead to "*an early onset of fatigue*" which leads to "*lower survivability in combat*," and reduced lethality when "*marksmanship degrades as a result of fatigue*." Even stronger women, called the "*physical elite*" are vulnerable to debilitating, sometimes life-long injuries in close combat.

Of eleven factors the British report predicted would have "*negative*" effects on combat effectiveness, three "*cannot be mitigated by changes to structure or training*." The three show-stoppers, which eclipse all other considerations in the combat arms, were "*Survivability and Lethality, Deployability, and Morbidity*" (injury or illness).

Similar findings regarding physiology appear in the March 2015 edition of [Military Medicine](#) magazine, a professional journal of the Association of Military Surgeons of the U.S. (AMSUS). This information and much more deserves careful consideration, especially since there is no evidence that women should be considered interchangeable with men in the combat arms.

Joint Chiefs Chairman General Martin Dempsey said in January 2013 that a standard too high for women would be questioned. *"Does it really have to be that hard?"* General Dempsey also called for a "critical mass" of women in the combat arms – a goal that could only be achieved if women are involuntarily assigned in great numbers that help to meet *"gender diversity metrics,"* a Pentagon-endorsed euphemism for quotas.

Despite current denials, officials would have to adjust training requirements under the "Dempsey Rule," meaning, *"If it's too hard for women then it's probably too hard."* This would result in "validated" standards that are "gender-neutral" but lower than before. How would this improve or benefit mission capability in the combat arms?

The need for transparency and responsible congressional oversight is obvious and long overdue. Nevertheless, advocates who demand that women be ordered into combat arms units such as the infantry want to preclude congressional oversight, making it impossible to objectively review and analyze the results of recent research and to consider additional issues.

Rep. Loretta Sanchez has sponsored pending NDAA language that would reduce to only 30 calendar days the requirement that Defense Department officials must notify Congress of policy changes regarding women in direct ground combat. The notification law also requires an analysis of legal consequences affecting women's eligibility for Selective Service obligations.

Approval of the Sanchez amendment would essentially surrender the policy-making authority of the legislative branch on a matter of paramount importance. We hope that the House will reconsider this ill-advised bill language and that members of the Senate will not concur with it.

Instead, both houses of Congress should retain and *strengthen* the notification law, improve transparency, and conduct full hearings on the consequences for women's health and mission readiness if the administration's plans are imposed on the armed forces by January 2016.

Ordering women into the combat arms is not a pro-women policy. An official survey showed that 92.5% Army women did not want land combat assignments. There is no need to increase the number of disabled female veterans, just to prove egalitarian beliefs about gender equality – especially in view of the fact that women are promoted at rates equal to or faster than men.

We hope you agree that policy changes affecting all military women – and eventually civilian women of Selective Service registration age – should be rooted in reality, science, and experience, not theories and unsupported assumptions.

To act on that premise, we ask that committee members insist on the opportunity to receive and review all research findings before controversial policies are implemented. We also ask that the Senate avoid taking any action that would accelerate flawed policies known to increase risks of debilitating injury and mission failure for both women and men in the combat arms.

This would be the best way to show true respect for our courageous women and men who volunteer to serve. We have sent a similar letter to House Armed Services Committee Chairman Representative "Mac" Thornberry.

Respectfully,

The Undersigned  
(Titles for ID only)

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General Henry H. Shelton, USA (Ret.)  
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General Walter Boomer, USMC (Ret.)  
Former Asst. Commandant, USMC

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Former Chief of Naval Operations

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Admiral Jerome L. Johnson, USN (Ret.)  
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