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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0549

February 26, 2013

General James Amos
Commandant of the Marine Corps
3000 Marine Corps Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350-3000

Dear General Amos,

I am writing today to express my concern about suicide in the United States Marine Corps and my desire to work with the Marine Corps and our military communities to better prevent such tragedies.

Recent news reports indicate that after a two-year downward trend, the Marine Corps suffered a 50% increase in suicides in 2012; the highest increase in the Department of Defense. The Marines who took their own lives last year are tragic indicators that we must further intensify our efforts to understand and prevent service member suicides.

Suicide in the military is an extremely complex issue. In 2010, several neurological experts and Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs officials testified before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee about the relationship between PTSD, TBI, and suicide. These experts also noted that from 2001 to 2009, more than 40% of service members who committed suicide had received some sort of mental health treatment. Despite the advancing research on the issue, however, it remains clear that we have a long way to go in understanding and preventing suicide in the military.

The Marine Corps has taken important steps to address this issue, such as Never Leave a Marine Behind training and Force Preservation Councils. However, the recent spike in suicides indicates much work remains to be done.

Representing Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton and the tens of thousands of active-duty Marines, retired Marines, and their families who call California's 49th district home, I would like more information on the Marine Corps' prevention and education efforts and input as to how Congress may best support those efforts. In particular:

1. Are there measures of effectiveness for suicide prevention training, suicide prevention phone lines, and other such programs? If so, what is working and what is not?

2. Are there measures of effectiveness for Force Preservation Councils? If so, what are the outcomes to date? If a Marine is highlighted at a Force Preservation Council, what actions are taken to help that Marine?

3. What are the statistics on the relationship between TBI, PTSD, and mental health treatment amongst Marines who take their own lives? Are Marines with these issues receiving adequate mental health treatment and other medical support?

4. What measures are being taken by Marine Corps Community Services and Marine Family Programs to integrate family members into suicide prevention efforts? Are outside community organizations providing assistance?

5. Are there impediments to superior methods for prevention that Congress should examine? Are there successful programs that could use additional Congressional support?

The well-being of our Marines and their families in the 49th District is a responsibility that I take very seriously. I encourage you to continue taking every measure to prevent suicide in the Corps and I look forward to working with you on this vital matter.

Sincerely,



Darrell Issa
Member of Congress

cc:SECNAV/CNO