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in order of seniority*

April 10, 2014

Secretary Charles Hagel
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

RE: Army Regulation 670-1

Dear Secretary Hagel,

We write to you regarding the United States Army's updated regulation, AR 670-1, that specifies hairstyles often worn by many African American women, and other minority women, as unauthorized. Though we understand the intent of the updated regulation is to ensure uniformity in our military, it is seen as discriminatory rules targeting soldiers who are women of color with little regard to what is needed to maintain their natural hair.

African American women have often been required to meet unreasonable norms as it relates to acceptable standards of grooming in the workplace. Understand that these standards should shift based on each community's unique and practical needs. New cultural norms and trends naturally change, ensuring that no person feels targeted or attacked based on his or her appearance. We believe the Army's updated rules and the way they are written fail to recognize this reality.

Army officials have responded to criticism of the regulation by saying it applies to all soldiers regardless of race, and that they are meant to protect their safety. However the use of words like "unkempt" and "matted" when referring to traditional hairstyles worn by women of color are offensive and biased. The assumption that individuals wearing these hairstyles cannot maintain them in a way that meets the professionalism of Army standards indicates a lack of cultural sensitivity conducive to creating a tolerant environment for minorities.

We strongly encourage you to reconsider the updated regulation as it relates to grooming standards and how it allows individuals from every community to feel proud and welcome to serve in our nation's Armed Forces. Many African American women put forth great effort in ensuring their hair is maintained in a way that allows them to be acknowledged for their ability and commitment to the tasks and challenges before them, rather than their appearance. We urge you to consider the direction in which the updated regulation will ultimately lead the Armed Forces.

Sincerely,

The Women of the Congressional Black Caucus



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