

5 September 2012

Brigadier General Vincent A. Coglianese
Commanding General
Marine Corps Installations West – Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton
Camp Pendleton, CA 92055



Brigadier General Coglianese:

I am writing in response to confirmed news reports that four United States Marines under your command at Camp Pendleton were arrested for severely beating a civilian man they perceived to be gay. The report is particularly troubling as we approach the one-year anniversary of the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell. While the alleged actions of these Marines may be an isolated incident, there is an immediate need for forceful and corrective action to ensure that all Marines at Camp Pendleton know that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation will not be tolerated in any form, and that all Marines should feel safe regardless of their sexual orientation.

According to reports, the four accused Marines sought out a gay bar and went in to have several drinks. They eventually began taunting patrons with homophobic slurs before settling on an individual to physically assault. The Marines allegedly beat the victim, who was there with his boyfriend, until he passed out. An employee at the bar attempted to intervene in the assault, but the violence reportedly continued until police arrived.

This targeting of a gay civilian because of his sexual orientation is very troubling, and statements made by the police indicate that the incident may result in hate crimes prosecutions. We urge you to ensure that there is a thorough investigation of these serious allegations. We also urge you to undergo a comprehensive review of the command climate at Camp Pendleton. You said in a letter dated 18 November 2011 that you "will not tolerate discrimination of any type by any member" under your command. It should be clear in every command that discrimination based on sexual orientation is unacceptable in the United States Marine Corps. Should a thorough investigation reveal that there was criminal behavior on the part of these Marines, or if the command climate needs correction, we are confident you will take the appropriate action to send an unambiguous message to all in your command.

Sincerely,

Aubrey Sarvis
Executive Director

CC: General James Amos
Commandant, United States Marine Corps

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
General Counsel, Department of Defense