Aug. 1, 2012

The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to raise our concerns about the sponsorship relationship between the United States Marine Corps and Zuffa, LLC, the parent company of the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), the nation's largest promoter of professional cage fighting events.

We believe the homophobic and sexist statements of people associated with the UFC are deeply at odds with the values of the Marine Corps and conflict with the Defense Department's stated commitment to tolerance and respect for diversity.

The owners of the UFC have tolerated incidents of hate speech, jokes about rape, homophobic slurs and sexually explicit remarks that are demeaning toward women. The following are some recent examples:

- On March 3rd, Brandon C. Saling, who is a convicted sex offender and wears tattoos linked to Neo-Nazi culture, was allowed to compete in a televised event held by Strikeforce, a professional cage fighting promotion also owned by Zuffa.[i] Saling is listed in Ohio's sex offender registry for the offense of "gross sexual imposition."[ii] Yet, Saling was allowed to compete before thousands of fans at the Nationwide Arena in Columbus, Ohio, in an event that was broadcast on the Showtime network.[iii]

- At a public press conference in December 2011, UFC fighter Rashad Evans taunted his opponent by threatening to act like former Pennsylvania State University assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky, who at the time faced more than 50 counts of sexual misconduct involving young boys. Evans said, "I'm gonna put those hands on you worse than that dude did them other kids at Penn State."[iv]

- In December 2011, UFC fighter Miguel Torres was briefly released by the UFC after he posted the following comment on his Twitter account: "If a rape van was called a surprise van more women wouldn't mind going for rides in them."[v] Torres was reinstated by the UFC less than a month later after he apologized for the rape tweet and made donations to several rape crisis centers.[vi]

- In November 2011, UFC light heavyweight fighter Forrest Griffin joked about rape on Twitter. "Rape is the new missionary," Griffin tweeted. After a woman objected to the tweet, Griffin

tweeted back, "Keep it to yourself nobody cares," according to the *Huffington Post*.[vii] Griffin apologized for the rape tweet and made a donation to a rape crisis center.[viii]

- In February 2011, UFC fighter Michael Bisping screamed, "faggot motherfucker," at his opponent Jorge Rivera.[ix] UFC president Dana White then posted footage of Bisping making the homophobic slur on his video blog.[x] This video is still publicly available on UFC's video channel on YouTube.

- In a September 2011 media conference call, UFC fighter Michael Bisping tried to smear an opposing coach on "The Ultimate Fighter" by saying that his opponent had a "gay chiropractor" on his staff.[xi]

- Last year, UFC fighter Quinton "Rampage" Jackson repeatedly urged fans in Japan, who did not appear to understand English, to say, "I am a faggot," "I suck dick," and "I have big tits," among other offensive comments. [xii] Even after LGBT organizations and the media last fall called attention to these slurs,[xiii] the UFC still allowed Jackson to compete in a televised UFC event in Tokyo, Japan.[xiv]

- According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "Rampage" Jackson shouted "every conceivable gay slur" at a movie crew member of "The A-Team" who had called him a homophobic epithet.[xv] He was also quoted in the article saying, "Acting is kind of gay. It makes you soft."[xvi]

- In August 2011, UFC fighter Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira was quoted saying that he would not train with gay students. He was quoted in *USA Today* saying, "What if the gay person has that malice of having physical contact with me, of staying there grappling? I would have no problems having a gay student in my academy, but I would rather not train with him."[xvii]

- In an expletive-filled video rant posted on YouTube.com, UFC president Dana White used an anti-gay slur, saying, "Whoever gave you that quote is a [expletive] and a [expletive] faggot and a [expletive] liar and everything else." He also uttered the "F" word a total of 34 times, the "S" word 4 times, and referred to a female sports journalist as a "fucking moron" and a "fucking dumb bitch."[xviii] White later apologized for the homophobic slur.[xix]

- Joe Rogan, who does commentary for televised UFC events, last year referred to a mixed-martial arts blogger as a part of the female anatomy. According to sportswriter Kevin Iole of *Yahoo! Sports*, Rogan then wrote on a blog, "Never did I imagine that so many people would get their panties in a bunch about the use of the word [expletive] to describe a female blogger."[xx]

These remarks by UFC fighters and others associated with the company are extremely offensive, to say the least. The U.S. Marines' continuing relationship with the UFC demeans service members and veterans who have served this country with honor and integrity. It also conflicts with the Defense Department's stated commitments to tolerance and to diversity in the military.

Additional incidents of socially irresponsible behavior by those associated with the UFC can be found below and at the website www.UnfitForChildren.com.

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- On March 3rd, Brandon C. Saling, who is a convicted sex offender and wears tattoos linked to Neo-Nazi culture, was allowed to compete in a televised event held by Strikeforce, a professional MMA promotion also owned by Zuffa.[iii] Saling is listed in Ohio's sex offender registry for the offense of "gross sexual imposition."[iv] Yet, Saling was allowed to compete before thousands of fans at the Nationwide Arena in Columbus, Ohio, in an event that was broadcast on the Showtime network.[v]

- In a video posted on YouTube, UFC fighter Alistair Overeem unfastened the bras of multiple women while holding a drink in one hand.[vi] The women in the video wore animal masks to cover their faces. Earlier this year, Overeemwas charged with misdemeanor battery for allegedly shoving a woman in the face at a Las Vegas casino. In March, Overeem was sentenced to 50 hours of community service and to undergo anger management counseling.[vii]

- UFC athletes have also made a number of derogatory remarks about Latinos. In a video, UFC heavyweight Brock Lesnar said of his opponent, Cain Velasquez, a Mexican-American, "When I get done whooping your ass, I'm gonna go drink a Corona and eat a burrito just for your Hispanic heritage, alright." Through Twitter, UFC middleweight Chael Sonnen reportedly told his opponent's Brazilian manager to, "pray to whatever Demon effigy you prance and dance in front of with your piglet tribe of savages that I decide not to crucify you."[viii] Sonnen denied that he made this and other comments, and wrote in an e-mail to *Willamette Week*, a newspaper in Portland, Ore., that, "I don't have a Twitter account." However, in a later televised interview, Sonnen not only claimed to have a twitter account, he also spelled out the address that was the source of the tweet.[ix]

- UFC fighter Quinton "Rampage" Jackson repeatedly urged fans in Japan, who did not appear to understand English, to say, "I am a faggot," "I suck dick," and "I have big tits," among other offensive comments in a video last year.[x] Even after LGBT organizations last fall called attention to these slurs,[xi] the UFC still allowed Jackson to compete in a televised UFC event in Tokyo, Japan.[xii]

- According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "Rampage" Jackson shouted "every conceivable gay slur" at a movie crew member of "The A-Team" who had called him a homophobic epithet.[xiii] He was also quoted in the article saying, "Acting is kind of gay. It makes you soft."[xiv]

- At a public press conference in December, UFC fighter Rashad Evans taunted his opponent by threatening to act like former Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky, who has been

convicted on 45 counts related to the sexual abuse of 10 boys.[xv] Evans said, "I'm gonna put those hands on you worse than that dude did them other kids at Penn State."[xvi]

- In November 2011, UFC light heavyweight fighter Forrest Griffin joked about rape on Twitter. "Rape is the new missionary," Griffin tweeted. After a woman objected to the tweet, Griffin tweeted back, "Keep it to yourself nobody cares," according to the *Huffington Post*.[xvii] Griffin apologized for the rape tweet and made a donation to a rape crisis center.[xviii]

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- After an October 2011 win, UFC fighter Chael Sonnen directed a comment at opponent Anderson Silva and Silva's wife. Sonnen said: "You tell Anderson Silva I'm coming over and kicking down his back door and patting his little lady on the (butt), and I'm telling her to make me a steak, medium-rare, just how I like it."[xxiii] Sonnen also appeared in an online video giving advice to young people on fighting. In the video Sonnen said, "If he slaps you, punch him. If he punches you, kick him. If he kicks you, stab him. If he stabs you, shoot him. If he shoots you, you go kill his family."[xxiv]

- Prior to a recent fight, Anderson Silva said of opponent Sonnen: "Chael Sonnen's going to get his ass kicked like he's never gotten his ass kicked before. What I'm going to do inside the octagon is something that's going to change the image of the sport. I'm going to beat his ass like he's never been beaten before. I'm going to make sure that every one of his teeth are broken, his arms are broken, (and) his legs are broke. He's not going to be able to walk out of the octagon by himself. I can guarantee that."[xxv]

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[i] Video at: http://www.towleroad.com/2011/02/bisping.html
[ii] YouTube video:http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbvKTpvsh3k
[iii] King, David, "Strikeforce Fighter Sports Racist Tattoo: Fan Reaction," March 4, 2012, *Yahoo! Sports*, http://sports.yahoo.com/mma/news?slug=ycn-11051404&print=1
[iv]http://www.icrimewatch.net/offenderdetails.php?OfndrID=1544492&AgencyID=55149
[v]http://www.ufc.com/news/SF-March-Three-Prelims
[vi] YouTube video, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SfW7UiWCGg

In a June 15 videotaped message, recognizing Gay Pride Month, you said, "I remain committed to removing as many barriers as possible to make America's military a model of equal opportunity, to ensure all who are qualified can serve in America's military, and to give every man and woman in uniform the opportunity to rise to their highest potential." In addition, you said the repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" law "reminds us that integrity and respect remain the cornerstones of our military culture."[xxi]

There have been disturbing revelations of sexual assaults within the ranks of the military. A Defense Department report released in April showed that reported sexual assaults involving service members rose in 2011, to 3,192, from 3,158, in 2010.[xxii] The Defense Department's statistics also indicate that, in 2010, just 14 percent of the estimated incidents of unwanted sexual contact actually went reported to a military authority.[xxiii]

In April, you reaffirmed the Defense Department's "zero tolerance" policy on sexual assault, stating, "We'll continue to devote our energy and our intention to enforcing our department's zero tolerance policy on sexual assault, and building a zero tolerance culture in the military for sexual assault."[xxiv]

The Defense Department's own zero tolerance policy on sexual assault should be expanded to prevent the Marine Corps from sponsoring an organization that tolerates jokes about rape and other misogynistic language.

Since May, more than 7,000 people have signed a petition calling on the Marine Corps to refrain from using taxpayer money to sponsor the UFC. On July 12th, a group of veterans and their supporters delivered these petitions to the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James Amos, as well as to Marine Corps recruiting stations in seven cities. For more information see **www.UnfitFortheCorps.org**.

The Marine Corps Recruiting Command responded with a short statement, saying, "The issues articulated in the petition regarding inappropriate conduct, alleged or substantiated, by a handful of UFC competitors and leadership are an area of concern that has been addressed with UFC. We are monitoring the issue and continuously evaluate the effectiveness of our advertising and lead generation partnerships. If corrective action is not implemented, we reserve the option to respond accordingly."

We believe the response by the Marine Corps is inadequate, given the recurring incidents of hate speech cited above. According to a poll on the official blog of the Marine Corps, 65 percent of respondents as of July 26 voted "No" to the question, "With a veterans group coming out against the practice, do you think the Marine Corps should continue to support the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC)?"[xxv]

We request that the Defense Department uphold the principles it espouses and immediately order the Marine Corps to renounce its support of the UFC and to refrain from sponsoring the UFC.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Chris Serres at (702)-386-5231 or send an e-mail to cserres@culinaryunion226.org.

Sincerely,

Jim DuPont
Chairman, Veterans Committee of UNITE HERE
U.S. Marine Corps veteran

Rep. Ruben Gallego
Arizona State Representative
U.S. Marine Corps veteran

Michael Ginsburg
Southern Nevada Director, Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada

Cleve Jones
Community and Political Coordinator, UNITE HERE

Robin P. McHaelen
Executive Director, True Colors, Inc.

Erin Neff
Executive Director, ProgressNow Nevada

Mike Reid
Executive Director, Veterans For Peace
U.S. Air Force veteran

Evelyn Thomas
Executive Director, The Sanctuary Project Veterans

Debby Tucker
Executive Director, National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence

Jennifer Wells
Executive Director, Protect Our Defenders

cc: The Honorable Ray Mabus
U.S. Secretary of the Navy

General Martin E. Dempsey
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

General James F. Amos
Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps

Colonel Ines N. White
Military Director, Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS)

Major General Gary S. Patton
Director, Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO)

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[ii] http://www.icrimewatch.net/offenderdetails.php?OfndrID=1544492&AgencyID=55149

[iii] http://www.ufc.com/news/SF-March-Three-Prelims

[iv] Gross, Josh, "Evans' Sandusky comment hits low note," Dec. 7, 2011, *ESPN.com*, http://espn.go.com/blog/mma/post/_/id/6893/evans-hits-low-note-with-sandusky-comment

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[x] YouTube video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbvKTpvsh3k

[xi] YouTube video, http://www.youtube.com/embed/PDfmy_p959s

[xii] http://www.worldstarhiphop.com/videos/video.php?v=wshh2zhS44X4iE40BITU

[xiii] Broverman, Neil, "Pressure on Anheuser-Busch to End Support for Homophobic UFC," Oct. 14, 2011, *Advocate.com*, http://www.advocate.com/News/Daily_News/2011/10/14/Pressure_on_AnheuserBusch_to_End_Support_for_Homophobic_UFC/

[xiv] http://www.ufc.com/event/ufc-144#/fight

[xv] Lee, Chris, "Rampage Jackson brings a bad attitude to `A-Team': `Acting is kind of gay'", May 29, 2010, *Los Angeles Times*, http://herocomplex.latimes.com/2010/05/29/rampage-jackson-brings-a-bad-attitude-to-ateam-acting-is-kind-of-gay/

[xvi] Ibid.

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[xviii] Video: http://www.blinkx.com/watch-video/ufc-president-dana-white-notorious-rant/FYZcYppmYJ5wwYruuKpvpw

[xix] "White sorry for anti-gay slur," April 3, 2009, *ESPN.com*, http://sports.espn.go.com/extra/mma/news/story?id=4038944

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[xiv] Ibid.

[xv] CNN Wire Staff, "Jury finds Jerry Sandusky guilty on dozens of child sex abuse charges", June 22, 2012, CNN.com, http://articles.cnn.com/2012-06-22/justice/justice_pennsylvania-sandusky-trial_1_sexual-abuse-guilty-verdicts-abuse-charges?_s=PM:JUSTICE

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