



December 4, 2007

The Honorable Pete Geren III
Secretary of the Army
101 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0101

Dear Secretary Geren:

On behalf of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the nation's largest organization representing people with serious mental illnesses and their families, I am writing to express our dismay over the prosecution of 1st Lt. Elizabeth Whiteside, as reported in *The Washington Post* this week, who we believe is being prosecuted by the Army for the "crime" of having a serious mental illness.

We believe the issues reported in the *Post* reflect a systemic lack of understanding throughout the Army in handling cases involving individuals with mental illnesses and their need for family support. NAMI calls on the Army to take immediate steps to drop the charges against Lt. Whiteside, provide education about mental illness at all levels of the Army, and change policies that discriminate against families of soldiers who are receiving treatment due to mental illness.

The callous way in which Lt. Whiteside is being treated is reminiscent of General George Patton slapping a "shell-shocked" soldier in World War II. It is hard to believe that over 60 years later, given what we have learned as a society about the stress of combat and its effects, that policies reflecting ignorance and discrimination against mental illness would still be tolerated and even encouraged within the Army's line command and Judge Advocate General Corps.

Army researchers recently revealed that suicide rates in the Army are at their highest levels in 26 years. In view of this, it is all the more shocking that Lt. Whiteside, after seven years of exemplary service, is facing court-martial for a suicide attempt that nearly resulted in her death. We ask you to immediately take the following steps:

- We believe the charges against 1st Lt. Whiteside are insupportable and should be dropped.
- If Lt. Whiteside desires to be discharged, she should be granted an honorable discharge or be medically retired and provided with ongoing health care, the same as for any other soldier. Alternatively, if she desires to remain in the Army, she should be provided a fitness-for duty determination.
- The policy of providing free lodging to non-medical attendant family members of soldiers with physical injuries recovering at Walter Reed or any other Army facility, but not those family members of soldiers with mental illnesses, must be changed to allow free lodging for both categories of families.

NAMI | The Nation's Voice on Mental Illness

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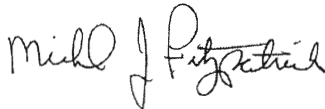
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- The Army should redouble efforts within the chain of command to educate personnel at all levels through a comprehensive program on mental illnesses and their causes, along with methods for more effectively responding to soldiers who experience them.

Given the high rates of mental illness being reported by your own researchers and clinicians among returning soldiers and veterans from deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq, we hope the Army will coordinate with other service branches and the Department of Veterans Affairs and become better prepared to respond appropriately, compassionately and humanely to soldiers experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression, and other serious mental illnesses, as in the case of this young officer. We owe this to individuals who are sacrificing so much to serve their country during wartime.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael J. Fitzpatrick".

Michael J. Fitzpatrick, M.S.W.
NAMI Executive Director

cc: MG Eric B. Schoonmaker, Office of the Army Surgeon General
MG Richard J. Rowe Jr., U.S. Military District of Washington