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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEBSITE: <https://commerce.senate.gov>

October 12, 2021

Lucinda Lessley
Acting Administrator, Maritime Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Acting Administrator Lessley:

I write to express my grave concern over the allegations of rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment made by midshipmen at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (“USMMA”) and the response by you and others at the Department of Transportation (“DOT”). Through the Maritime Legal Aid & Advocacy (“MLAA”), a legal advocacy group formed on behalf of mariners, victims’ stories of shipboard sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape have bravely shared their personal stories in blog posts on the group’s website. You and Deputy Secretary Trottenberg sent an open letter to the King’s Point community and posted it on the USMMA website on Saturday, October 2, 2021 acknowledging these allegations and expressing your unwavering support for the individual who shared her story on September 27. The despicable accounts put forth by brave young women and men just starting promising careers in the maritime industry are frightening and unacceptable. Many of these allegations involve a repeated pattern of crimes and intimidations committed by people in positions of power and responsibility on merchant ships, and include alleged poor oversight or policy failures of USMMA officials and Coast Guard investigators.

In light of the seriousness of these allegations, I ask that you provide the committee with a description of the steps that have been taken by Maritime Administration (“MARAD”), the DOT, and the USMMA to investigate the allegations made on the MLAA’s website, and actions taken in response to findings in those investigations. Additionally, I request the following information:

1. How many reports of rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment or related offenses have been reported by or concerning midshipmen of the USMMA in the last 10 years? Please provide a breakdown of these reports that includes whether the incidents occurred on campus, off campus, or at sea during Sea Year, the party that conducted the investigation(s), and the outcome of that investigation.
2. In the event that a midshipman is removed from a vessel following a sexual assault or harassment report(s), does USMMA remove all midshipmen onboard the vessel for

their Sea Year? Please include copies of the USMMA policy, regulation or other guidance on this matter.

3. If a vessel or its parent company is the subject of a sexual assault or sexual harassment complaint, does the USMMA assign midshipmen to those vessels in the future? Please include copies of the USMMA policy, regulation or other guidance on this matter.
4. In the event that a midshipman makes an informal or formal complaint of sexual assault, harassment, or discrimination, may they request to be assigned to a different vessel for the duration of their Sea Year? Please include copies of the USMMA policy, regulation or other guidance on this matter.
5. What actions can be and have been taken by the Coast Guard to withdraw or suspend credentials of mariners with a history of allegations of sexual assault and harassment against Sea Year midshipmen?

The maritime industry and United States Merchant Marine are a vital part of our national security and our nation's economy. Sexual harassment, sexual assault, and other offenses are unacceptable, and the USMMA must immediately take action to stop this behavior and protect the men and women of the USMMA both at the Academy, and at sea. To that end, I request responses to these questions no later than October 26, 2021. For any questions, you may contact majority staff lead on maritime policy, Nicole Teutschel at 202-224-0510 and majority chief investigative counsel, Caitlin Warner at 202-224-0290.

Sincerely,



MARIA CANTWELL
Chair

CC: Admiral Karl L. Schultz, Commandant, United States Coast Guard