

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 2, 2016

The Honorable Anthony Foxx
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

The Honorable Paul Jaenichen
Administrator
U.S. Maritime Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Admiral Jim Helis
Superintendent
U.S. Merchant Marine Academy
300 Steamboat Road
Kings Point, NY 11024

Dear Secretary Foxx, Administrator Jaenichen, and Admiral Helis:

We write to express our strong support for the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA) and the reinstatement of the Sea Year program with meaningful protective measures ensuring the security of all Midshipmen.

We strongly believe that one report of sexual assault or sexual harassment is too many and that meaningful action must be taken to safeguard Midshipmen against all forms of sexual harassment. As the Department, Maritime Administration (MARAD), and the Academy work to address climate and safety during Sea Year, it is important that you not lose sight of how important the Sea Year is for the USMMA curriculum and education of the Midshipmen. We urge you to address Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment (SASH) concerns and reinstate Sea Year as soon as practicable.

In its recent report on the Academy, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) stated, "the Sea Year is perceived as a rich and valuable experience. It is considered an invaluable and unique chance to have 'hands on' experience that enriches the portfolio of skills of the Midshipmen." The Sea Year is a core component of the Academy curriculum that provides unique training and leadership development opportunities that distinguish the Academy from other Service Academies and the State Maritime Academies.

Similarly, we write to urge the Department, MARAD, and the Academy to address the requirements detailed in the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) accreditation determination published on June 30, 2016 and to update us regularly on your progress in addressing them.

To those ends, we respectfully request you provide answers, in writing, to the following questions within 5 business days:

1. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) issued a warning to the Academy requiring it take actions to address deficiencies in five of

fourteen standards. What steps has the Academy taken to date to address these requirements? How long does the Academy anticipate it will take to address the MSCHE requirements?

2. When were requirements identified by the MSCHE Evaluation Team in April 2016 reported to USMMA administrators? What actions did USMMA administrators take, between when they were notified about these requirements and when the MSCHE determination was announced on June 30, 2016, to prevent USMMA from being placed on warning status?

3. What is the status of the ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology) accreditation process for engineers?

4. The 2016 USMMA Advisory Board Report did not identify many of the deficiencies cited in the MSCHE Evaluation Team report. What are the reasons for this discrepancy? Are there any efforts under way to make reforms to the Advisory Board as a result?

5. What data did the Academy and MARAD administrators provide to the Secretary of Transportation to inform Secretary Foxx's decision to suspend Sea Year?

6. Why has MARAD permitted State Maritime Academy students to sail on commercial vessels from which MARAD removed USMMA Midshipmen for safety and climate concerns?

7. What planning was done with industry, faculty (including the Shipboard Training Management Office), and the Midshipmen prior to removing Midshipmen from their assigned ships? What planning was done in consultation with U.S. Transportation Command and the U.S. Navy regarding the impact these actions might have on the supply of licensed mariners?

8. MARAD's Shipboard Climate Compliance Team (SCCT) has been assessing packages submitted by commercial shipping companies for compliance with MARAD's seven requirements for Sea Year Eligibility (SYE). Please provide an explanation for the Department of Transportation's decision not to reinstate Sea Year aboard vessels that show SYE until the recently announced independent assessment of the institutional and organizational culture at the USMMA is complete.

9. Many USMMA Midshipmen rely on Sea Year stipends to defray expenses. Will cadets assigned to training vessels be compensated for these lost wages?

10. Will there be changes made to the Sea Project grading rubric to accommodate affected Midshipmen?

11. Does MARAD require additional appropriations to fund the expenses associated with the Sea Year Stand Down? How much does MARAD project the Stand Down to cost?

12. Is MARAD considering making changes to graduation requirements so that USMMA may award degrees to Midshipmen that cannot obtain the sea days necessary for current graduation and licensure requirements? What will happen to these Midshipmen's eligibility as commissioned active duty military?

13. Admission representatives, most of whom are parents and/or alumni, have told us that they are finding it difficult to recruit qualified applicants to USMMA for future years because of the issues pertaining to SASH and accreditation. Does MARAD have a plan in place to improve attrition and recruitment? Please provide details of that plan.

14. Are the Department of Transportation and MARAD considering plans to close the United States Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA), either temporarily or permanently?

Sincerely,


PETER T KING
Member of Congress


JACKIE WALORSKI
Member of Congress


ROGER WICKER
United States Senator


DENNIS ROSS
Member of Congress


VIRGINIA FOXX
Member of Congress


RON KIND
Member of Congress


PETE SESSIONS
Member of Congress


LEE ZELDIN
Member of Congress


DEREK KILMER
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KATHLEEN RICE
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CHRIS GIBSON
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CHRIS SMITH
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RON DESANTIS
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