

**STATEMENT OF  
REAR ADMIRAL JAMES HELIS, U.S. MARITIME SERVICE  
SUPERINTENDENT  
UNITED STATES MERCHANT MARINE ACADEMY**

**BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SURFACE TRANSPORTATION AND  
MERCHANT MARINE INFRASTRUCTURE, SAFETY AND SECURITY  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**HEARING ON  
MARITIME TRANSPORTATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**APRIL 24, 2018**

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Fischer, Ranking Member Peters and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to update you on the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA or Academy) and highlight accomplishments made since I appeared before you last year.

First, I am pleased to say that the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) fully reaccredited the Academy in November 2017. I am proud of the commitment and effort shown by our faculty, staff, and Midshipmen in achieving this goal in a short period of time. It speaks to the dedication of the Academy community that so many worked so hard to address MSCHE's concerns.

We are building on this progress as we develop the Academy's 2018-2023 Strategic Plan. This March, we invited 161 representatives of the maritime industry, the Department of Defense, alumni, parents, Midshipmen, faculty, and staff to provide input on the plan. In addition, Academy staff solicited input from more than 700 stakeholders over the past few months. Our planning discussions are ongoing and we plan to have a final plan by graduation in June.

In June 2016, the Department paused Sea Year training on commercial vessels. Over the past year, the Academy restored Sea Year training on commercial vessels, and reestablished the mix of Midshipmen who completed Sea Year on commercial and Government vessels to pre-stand down levels. As of April 5, 2018, the Maritime Administration (MARAD) certified 17 commercial operators as eligible to host Midshipmen for Sea Year training.

We have been working hard to implement requirements established in the Fiscal Year 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (FY 2018 NDAA), P.L. 115-91, including testing global satellite communication devices for Midshipmen at sea. Those tests were successful and we are beginning to procure sufficient devices to equip all Midshipmen. MARAD and the Academy also worked with the Ship Operations Cooperative Program (SOCP), an organization with members

from across the maritime industry, to develop industry-standard sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention and response training. This training is required for all Midshipmen prior to starting Sea Year and is available to all commercial operators. As required by the FY 2018 NDAA, Academy staff has begun visiting commercial vessels hosting Midshipmen during Sea Year to ensure compliance MARAD Sea Year eligibility requirements. We have also surveyed Midshipmen returning from Sea Year in November 2017 and March 2018 and are analyzing these results to determine where further improvements can be made.

I am committed to the elimination of sexual assault and harassment on our campus and improving the environment at the Academy so that victims are comfortable reporting all incidents and they are confident that Academy personnel will respond appropriately to reported incidents. Over the past year, we have seen an increase in reports of sexual assault, with a total of 12 reports made. While this increase could reflect an increase in the number of sexual assaults taking place, it is more likely that it indicates greater confidence by victims that reports will be responded to appropriately and therefore more willingness by victims to make reports. The Office of People Analytics (formerly the Defense Manpower Data Center) began the bi-annual survey of Midshipmen in April 2018, which will be the basis for the next annual report to Congress.

The Academy has continued to build on its Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program, established in 2012, by implementing provisions of the FY 2018 NDAA, including expanding and improving training requirements for Midshipmen, faculty, and staff; updating procedures for handling reports of sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking; and refining a plan to combat retaliation against Midshipmen who make reports. We have also increased staffing of the SAPR Office, which now includes a SAPR program manager/Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC); a Sea Year coordinator, who is an activated U.S. Navy Reserve Strategic Sealift Officer and an Academy alumnus with commercial sailing experience; and one Victim Advocate/Prevention Educator, with a second in the process of being hired. The Academy also expects to hire an attorney shortly who will be available to provide sexual assault and harassment legal advice to victims. In addition, the Academy has five volunteer Victim Advocates from the faculty trained and certified to receive restricted and unrestricted reports of sexual assault. The Academy has also completed a contract with the Rape Assault Incest National Network (RAINN) to establish and operate a 24/7 worldwide hotline with access to worldwide resources, similar to the Department of Defense Safe Helpline. We expect Midshipmen to have phone, text, and internet-based access to RAINN in May 2018.

While the Academy has made progress in developing its SAPR Program, we know there is more work to be done. The recent Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General (DOT IG) report on the Academy's SAPR Program highlights gaps in prevention sexual assault and sexual harassment, as well as processes for evaluating the effectiveness of the program. The Academy has concurred with the ten recommendations made by the DOT IG to improve the program and is acting to address the recommendations. For example, the Academy is implementing a procedure

for validating the Academy's data on reported sexual assault and sexual harassment incidents, which we expect to have finalized very soon. In addition, the Academy is working to improve communication of policies and procedures to all Academy stakeholders.

The Academy has also been focused on addressing the culture at the Academy regarding sexual assault and harassment. The LMI study completed in 2016 identified challenges in Academy culture in terms of inclusiveness, respect for differences, and empathy for victims of sexual assault and all forms of harassment. Sexual assault is a symptom of a culture that tolerates it and does not want to acknowledge or accept it as a problem. Tolerance can arise from peer pressure not to "get someone in trouble" and an absence of inclusiveness that signals a tolerance of these behaviors. This is a core issue that we must address. The entire USMMA community must have zero tolerance for sexual assault and sexual harassment, retaliation, bullying, hazing, coercion, victim blaming, and alcohol misuse/abuse. To begin, we have launched the "Be KP" campaign, which is a campus-wide effort led by Midshipmen, with support from faculty and staff, to focus on Academy values, enhance pride, and build a campus climate in which each individual is valued and has the opportunity to reach their fullest potential. Our approach is to re-emphasize the Academy's core values—Respect, Honor, Service—with the goal of eliminating signals of intolerance that are enablers for those who commit sexual assault and barriers to reporting for victims.

As we look to the future, there are positive trends at the Academy that we intend to build upon. Over the past few years, the quality and diversity of incoming classes has improved and we expect to see continued progress in this area. We are also making great strides in improving campus facilities. We have completed construction and outfitting of Zero Deck of the Midshipmen barracks to include additional fitness rooms, baggage storage for Midshipmen during Sea Year, a recreation center, and club storage and meeting places. The Academy's wi-fi network has been expanded to the barracks and new furniture has been installed in two of them. Additional surveillance cameras have been installed primarily in the barracks, the security command center has been upgraded, and improvements have been made across campus on drainage and paving. Thanks to a generous gift from the Academy Alumni Foundation, the gym floor has been refurbished. We have also replaced equipment in one of the gym's weight rooms. Looking ahead, funding provided in the recently passed FY 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act, P.L. 115-141 will allow facilities improvements to continue, with \$45 million in funding for capital improvements and \$7 million for facilities maintenance, repair, and equipment. These increases will enable us among other things to accelerate the timeline to renovate and upgrade our Midshipmen health service and athletic facilities, enhance campus lighting and vehicle access control, and continue work to repair the sea wall, roads, and parking areas on campus.

Thank you for inviting me to testify today. I appreciate your interest and continued support for the Academy and will be happy to answer any questions you may have.