

**COAST GUARD ACADEMY WHISTLEBLOWERS:
STORIES OF SEXUAL ASSAULT AND HARASSMENT**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS
OF THE

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

DECEMBER 12, 2023

Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.govinfo.gov>

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2023

U.S. SENATE,
PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS,
OF THE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m., in room SD-562, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Richard Blumenthal, Chair of the Subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Blumenthal [presiding], Hassan, Butler, Johnson, and Hawley.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR BLUMENTHAL¹

Senator BLUMENTHAL. This hearing of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (PSI) will come to order. Welcome, everyone. Thank you all for being here, my colleagues who are here, and most especially the witnesses who have joined us. This hearing is about a culture of cover-up. It is a culture of cover-up that the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) has spawned and sustained for decades. It has discouraged and deterred victims and survivors of sexual abuse at the Coast Guard Academy from coming forward. It has denied them justice, and it has failed to protect them from retaliation and reprisal when they have stood up and spoken out. For years, this culture enabled sexual misconduct to occur, despite evidence of widespread, unaddressed, and egregious violations of basic norms, and we want to make sure that there is not only transparency but also accountability going forward.

This culture has continued to refuse accountability, the type of accountability that comes from naming names and holding wrongdoers accountable. It is the type of accountability that requires full cooperation with this Subcommittee's inquiry, which so far the Coast Guard has failed to fully do. As we will hear today, it is a culture that has all too often victimized survivors twice, first when they are assaulted or harassed, and then later when the leaders in command have failed to hold the perpetrators fully accountable and it is a culture that has fostered fear of coming forward, fear that lives would be destroyed, fear that all too often has been proven right.

¹The prepared statement of Senator Blumenthal appears in the Appendix on page 35.

This is not just about Fouled Anchor. It is about lost anchor. It is about a Coast Guard that has lost its way in doing justice for women who are victims and survivors of sexual assault. It is about a Coast Guard that has abandoned its moral compass and lost its ethical sonar. We are here because the Coast Guard has continued this problem, and we know that the culture can and must be fixed.

This past summer, we learned that the Coast Guard failed to disclose to Congress a multiyear internal investigation into dozens of instances of sexual assault at the Academy that had been reported but not adequately investigated or otherwise addressed. That investigation, known as Fouled Anchor, looked at 102 instances of rape or sexual assault at the Coast Guard Academy from the early 1990s through 2006, ultimately identifying 43 alleged perpetrators with a total of 63 victims. Yet, That investigation, or so-called investigation, failed to even scratch the surface.

The majority of our witnesses here today will talk about violations of their rights, sexual assault that occurred outside that time-frame, so it was not covered by Operation Fouled Anchor (OFA). The investigation found that the Academy had previously been aware of allegations against 30 of those 43 alleged perpetrators, but that only five, only five had been reported to law enforcement at the time. The report from this investigation concluded that the Academy leadership who oversaw these cases did not, and I quote, "instill a culture intolerant of any form of sexual misconduct. They did not promote and maintain a climate conducive to reporting incidents of sexual assault, and they did not adequately investigate alleged offenses as serious criminal matters and hold perpetrators appropriately accountable."

This Subcommittee opened a bipartisan inquiry soon after Operation Fouled Anchor was disclosed. Our inquiry, which is ongoing, has already found that Operation Fouled Anchor failed to address sexual misconduct in a vast number of cases at the Coast Guard Academy. We have heard accounts from numerous individuals with disturbing personal gripping, painful stories of sexual assault and harassment at the Coast Guard Academy, and in the Coast Guard. Those survivors include both men and women, and they span nearly five decades of Coast Guard alumni and retirees.

Four of these brave individuals are here with us today, and on behalf of myself and all of my colleagues, I want to thank each of you for being here. I want to thank each of you for your courage and tenacity in coming forward. The stories that we are going to hear today show how the Coast Guard Academy fostered an environment where assaults and harassment not only persisted, but fueled the culture of cover-up where survivors who did come forward were not treated with the seriousness and respect they deserve. I want to share part of one, just one individual story from a former cadet, who is not here today, just one of numerous accounts that the Subcommittee has received in recent weeks, and we are going to make some of them part of this record.

This woman, who is a constituent, was assaulted twice in her first year at the Academy but did not disclose these assaults to anyone for decades, including members of her family. I am quoting, "The rumors that existed about other girls who reported assaults were awful, and they eventually left the service because they were

not taken seriously, and in some cases, blamed for their assault. I hid the assaults from everyone that I knew, including my family and closest friends.” This is a woman who chose the Academy, a woman who was committed to public service and chose to serve her country, but because of what she experienced, she decided to forego a lifelong career in the Coast Guard, and our nation is worse off for it.

The stories that we have heard from survivors, that we are going to hear, in fact, from our witnesses today, are echoed by the Coast Guard’s own data, a 2022 survey. A survey of cadets revealed that nearly 30 percent of female cadets experienced unwanted sexual conduct and contact since arriving at the Academy. That means that for every four female cadets, one or more has experienced unwanted sexual contact. That same survey found that only 15 percent of female survivors reported their assaults, and half of those who did, they experienced retaliation. More than half of female cadets surveyed reported experiencing sexual harassment in the last year.

I am encouraged that the Coast Guard is signaling that they are beginning to take this problem seriously. The Coast Guard recently released the results of a 90-day Accountability and Transparency Review (ATR), ordered by the Commandant after Operation Fouled Anchor was disclosed. This review includes programmatic recommendations aimed at addressing the deeply rooted cultural issues within the Coast Guard, and we support these efforts. I believe them to be a positive first step, but let me be very clear—there is no accountability in that report. There is no naming of names. There is no reason given for the 3½-year delay between completion of Operation Fouled Anchor and its disclosure to the Congress. That report was concealed, hidden, and withheld from the U.S. Congress. This 90-day review in no way provides accountability.

The Coast Guard’s, quote, “Accountability Task Force” did not, in fact, recommend any steps to hold accountable past perpetrators or generations of Coast Guard leaders who oversaw and enabled that culture of misconduct to buildup that enabled the cover-up. Accountability is essential to ensure justice for victims and survivors, and prevent it from occurring in the future. There is no deterrence without accountability. Perpetrators must know that their actions will be punished, and that the survivors and victims will be protected.

The Coast Guard also has to do more to fully cooperate with this Subcommittee’s investigation, and produce documents that we have requested in order to reveal the full scope of the culture of cover-up that has existed on their watch. While we are encouraged that the Coast Guard has produced some records, we have yet to receive a single internal email related to the decision of whether or not to disclose the report on Operation Fouled Anchor—not one internal email disclosed so far. These critical documents must be provided without further delay.

Let me just say finally, while this hearing is primarily focused on the Coast Guard, and specifically the Academy, we know that these issues are not limited to the Coast Guard or to the Coast Guard Academy. The culture of cover-up has inevitably bled from

the ranks of the Academy to the Coast Guard itself. These problems persist in other military services, and we need to be determined to rid all of our military of sexual assault and harassment.

The Coast Guard has a long and storied history of service to our Nation. It is vital to our domestic safety and national defense. I have been a strong supporter of the Coast Guard, a strong supporter of the Academy, a strong supporter of a museum that will tell the story of the Coast Guard. But the strongest supporters of the Coast Guard ought to be the most determined to rid it of this scorching scourge, and I hope that this hearing and the others that will follow it in our investigation will help in that effort. I will turn to the Ranking Member.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHNSON

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chair. There is really not much more I can add than what you have already said in terms of laying out the purpose of this hearing. It is beyond unfortunate that we even have to have this hearing, but this hearing is imperative. I will just ask that my own opening statement just be entered into the record.¹

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Without objection.

Senator JOHNSON. Reading through the testimony, going through the briefing here, it is outrageous what you have had to endure. I appreciate your courage coming forward. It is an obvious lack of leadership. The culture of cover-up is pervasive. To have allowed this to continue for decades shows the extent of the problem. This Committee is not going to solve the problem. It has to be solved within the services themselves, and within government agencies. This is the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigation. We should be the premier investigatory and oversight body of the U.S. Senate. I agree with Senator Blumenthal when he said that the Coast Guard needs to do more to cooperate.

We have gotten some records in response to a joint letter that we sent. I am glad you mentioned the fact that we have not yet got one email talking about the internal discussion of why they decided to withhold the results of the Fouled Anchor report for 3½ years. It was not, by the way, their decision after 3½ years to finally give that to Congress. Fortunately, we had Cable News Network (CNN), a news organization that was inquisitive enough to do investigative reporting and reveal this. They did not come clean on their own. This was exposed and they then came clean prior to that public disclosure.

What I am hoping you will do, Mr. Chair, is if they do not respond on time—and there is no reason they cannot start a rolling production of documents. I mean this is not that hard, to go into emails, do searches, and start producing some of these documents in terms of what was the communication that resulted in this 3½-year cover-up? I guess what I am saying is, if they do not produce those documents, or at least begin the production of those critical emails on the date we have given them, I want, and I will support you in issuing a subpoena. I hope we do that.

¹The prepared statement of Senator Johnson appears in the Appendix on page 38.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. We will certainly take that action if necessary.

Senator JOHNSON. But I would like to take this moment—I do not get a whole lot of opportunities here—to expand a little bit, because you talked about the culture of cover-up, and that is not just in the Coast Guard. It is also within the Department of Defense (DOD), and not just on these issues, on a host of issues. It is also in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). It is throughout Federal agencies. Mr. Chair, I have written you a couple of pretty lengthy letters over the weekend. I am hoping you have had a chance to review that. I just want to talk to those issues.

One of the letters is requesting you issue subpoenas to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on the fact that they have not been responsive, certainly to my oversight, my investigation requests, as relates to the cover-up of the creation of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). For example, Anthony Fauci's funding of the Wuhan lab. In particular, through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, HHS has provided something like 4,000 pages to a FOIA request—not to Congress, to a FOIA request—of Anthony Fauci, Francis Collins, other people's emails. They are heavily redacted. Congress is not subject to those redactions.

We know the 4,000 pages exist. As an accommodation to HHS, we said, well, we are interested in these 400 pages. We want to see those unredacted. They did not give them to us. What they did allow is over the course of many months, they have allowed us to go into a secure room, and they provided those documents unredacted. We could not take copies; we could take notes. Again, we asked for 400 pages; we have been able to review 350. We are down to the last 50 pages. This has been over a year. This is what they have produced to us so far. Now I do not know about you, but this makes me pretty curious about what HHS is covering up in emails between Anthony Fauci as it relates to his funding of the Wuhan lab. I am asking you to issue a subpoena to HHS to get these and other documents I have requested on the gain-of-function research and the cover-up of HHS in terms of their funding of it.

The other point I want to make, another issue that has been near and dear to my heart is vaccines and the lack of transparency of the agencies related to vaccine injuries, their analysis of their Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). They had what they called a standard operating procedure (SOP); they were going to do things called proportional reporting ratios, or empirical Bayesian analyses. They talked about this openly before they got the emergency use authorization on the vaccines. They have on occasion said they did not do it. Then they have admitted they have done it. I have been now for a couple of years just asking them to give me their own analysis of what they are seeing in terms of safety signals from their VAERS system. Now this is information the public has a right to know. We fund these agencies. They have these surveillance systems on an emergency use authorized vaccine that the American people, in order to have informed consent to actually take the vaccines, ought to know.

A quick few little figures here. To date, worldwide deaths reported in the VAERS system associated with the COVID vaccine

were up to 36,726 deaths worldwide. What is notable about that is 8,976, about 24 percent of those deaths, are occurring at a zero, one in two following vaccination. Now I realize VAERS does not prove causation, but that sure is a correlation that concerns me. I for the life of me cannot understand why it is not concerning the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The other problem with VAERS is it generally dramatically understates the number of adverse events. Now oftentimes I get the pushback that, we have given billions of these doses, so of course, and any medical intervention is going to have problems. There is risks associated with everything. If you take a look at deaths per million dose—and I have done that calculation—it is not that easy, because we do not have doses of flu. But to compare it to flu vaccine—there have been 25.5 deaths per million doses of the COVID vaccine. If you compare that to the flu vaccine, assuming 70 percent of the distributed vaccines are actually injected, there is .46 deaths per million doses. That is a 55-fold increase deaths per million doses, with the COVID vaccine versus the flu vaccine—55-fold increase. This ought to concern the FDA and the CDC.

I have written close to 60 oversight letters to Federal health agencies on things. I have gotten virtually no response on any of these things. It is about time we start subpoenaing them, at a minimum, for their analysis of the VAERS system and what the VAERS system is telling them. Again, I am asking you to use this Subcommittee, again the premier oversight investigatory committee of the U.S. Senate, to start getting these Federal health agencies to be transparent, because there is a culture of cover-up, not only in the Coast Guard, but throughout the Federal Government, and unfortunately we have allowed our oversight ability and capabilities to atrophy over time, because the Federal agencies realize we just do not enforce our constitutional authority to do so.

Again, switching back to this hearing, I truly appreciate you coming forward, telling your stories. They are hard to read, and they will be hard to listen to, but they are important stories for the American people to hear the truth, because the only way there is going to be accountability here is through exposure of the truth, and the only way you get exposure of the truth is if we get these documents and these agencies stop covering up. Again, thank you for appearing here, and I am not looking forward to the testimony, because I have read it, OK? It is going to be hard to listen to. You should not have had to endure this, but I appreciate you coming forward, and we will listen to your testimony.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks for your comment, Senator Johnson. As you and I have discussed—and I have read your letters from the weekend—we want to work with you, and we can discuss our concerns a little bit later. I am going to introduce the witnesses; then we will swear you in and hear your testimony. There will be questions afterward, I think probably 7-minute rounds.

We are very fortunate to have with us first Commander Jennifer Yount. Commander Yount graduated from the Coast Guard Academy in 1981, part of the second class of women to graduate from the Academy. Commander Yount served in the Coast Guard for more than 20 years, where she served in a variety of positions, in-

cluding as the second woman to command a United States commandant—combatant, I should say. Since retirement, Commander Yount has held leadership positions in higher education and served as a member of the Advisory Board on Women in the Coast Guard. Commander Yount is also a leader of Coasties Thriving Together, an independent action team of volunteer Coast Guard veterans serving survivors of military sexual and physical trauma. Today, Commander Yount will share her personal experiences at the Coast Guard Academy and the Coast Guard.

Mrs. Caitlin E. Maro. Caitlin Maro is a former member of the Coast Guard Academy Class of 2008. She was honorably discharged from the Coast Guard in 2005 after completing one semester. She graduated from Rowan University with a Bachelor of Art (BA) in political science in 2009, and has completed coursework toward a master's in American history from Rutgers University. During her studies, she served as an intern in the House of Representatives and with the Senate Commerce Committee. Mrs. Maro was born in Philadelphia, raised in New Jersey, and now lives in western Tennessee with her husband and children.

Lieutenant Melissa McCafferty. Lieutenant McCafferty is a 2011 graduate of the Coast Guard Academy. She served as Director of Operations and Deputy Director of Operations in the Coast Guard's response to Hurricanes Irma, Maria, and Harvey. She is a Tillman and Truman Scholar. She received a master's in applied economics from Johns Hopkins University, and is a 2023 graduate of Georgetown University Law Center. Lieutenant McCafferty is currently in private practice in Washington, DC, and she will share her personal experiences as well.

Cadet Holmstrup is a member of the Coast Guard Academy Class of 2024. For the past 2 years, she has served as the president of Cadets Against Sexual Assault (CASA), a student-run organization that provides resources for her peers who have experienced sexual assault, and advocates for improved policies and procedures.

Colonel Lorry Fenner, United States Air Force (USAF), Retired. Colonel Fenner is the Director of Government Relations at the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN), an organization advocating for the needs of over 350,000 servicewomen and two million women veterans in the United States. Colonel Fenner served in the United States Air Force for 26 years, and she commanded units at various levels. After retiring, she worked on Capitol Hill, led research teams, published and edited work on women and minorities in the military. Colonel Fenner holds a Ph.D. and a master's degree in history from the University of Michigan, and a master's in national security strategy from the National War College. Her expertise will help us understand how military culture policies in the Coast Guard and elsewhere can foster a culture of cover-up that is tolerant of sexual assault and harassment.

If you would please rise and raise your right hand, I will swear you in. Do you swear that the testimony that you will give today before this Committee is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you, God?

All Witnesses. I do.

Thank you. Why do we not go left to right. If you would please begin.

**TESTIMONY OF COMMANDER JENNIFER L. YOUNT,¹ USCG,
RET. UNITED STATES COAST GUARD ACADEMY, CLASS OF 1981**

Commander YOUNT. Yes, sir. Good morning, Senator Blumenthal, Ranking Member Johnson, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. I entered the Coast Guard Academy as the second class of women in 1977, and graduated in 1981. I then had a 20-year career with the Coast Guard and retired as the Commanding Officer of the Cutter Dauntless. Afterwards, I became a maritime professor. Today, I am a leadership coach, consultant, and trainer.

I am testifying because I love the Academy and the Coast Guard. I cherish and appreciate the training, education, and lifetime of opportunities the Academy and the Coast Guard provided me. I bleed Coast Guard blue. I am not testifying to damage the Coast Guard or the Academy; I am doing so to make it better.

My first assault while in the Coast Guard's service happened in the spring of 1978, during an Academy tradition known as Billet Night. Two first-class cadets broke down my roommate's and my locked door, entered our room, and jumped onto our beds on top of us. We were paralyzed with fear. At some point, and for whatever reason, the cadet on top of me got up. I am not sure why. He then pulled his classmate off my roommate and they both left us, closing the door behind them. Several days later, the damage to the door was noticed by the inspecting officer. Without any questions about how the door was damaged, my roommate and I were given demerits for destruction of government property. I did not report this assault, because I did not believe my experience would be taken seriously. How could I, when I, not my attacker, received punishment after the assault.

Unfortunately, this was not my only experience with sexual misconduct while in the Coast Guard. After graduation, I faced sexual harassment on two separate ships, the emotional and mental consequences of which almost cost me my career. Throughout my 20-year career, the service has repeatedly attempted to assure me that it has improved its systems and policies to better protect its own. However, our testimony, the Operation Fouled Anchor report, and the stories you have heard throughout the years all indicate that the Coast Guard has simply not done enough.

Sitting in front of me is a stack of studies and reports beginning with a 2016 report to Congress, and ending with Admiral Fagan's directed actions. It has not been enough. The world's greatest Coast Guard let down all the women and men who have survived sexual military assault and trauma for the past 47 years, and 50 years since women first entered the service. This status quo can no longer continue.

My written testimony includes several recommendations. They range from limiting alcohol consumption at the Academy to improving veteran record management so that Coast Guard survivors can receive disability compensation. They include improvements to the Academy's Board of Trustees, and improved Academy dormitory supervision. However, the recommendation that means the most to me is accountability. Throughout the Operation Fouled Anchor fall-

¹The prepared statement of Commander Yount appears in the Appendix on page 40.

out, Coast Guard leadership has insisted on focusing on the future. As a member of the Class of 1981, I say until the Coast Guard acknowledges the breadth and seriousness of what has happened, which has been a systemic problem that has impacted the very culture of the institution, we cannot move forward and take the steps necessary to effect meaningful change. A cultural transformation of the Academy and the Coast Guard must occur so that surviving is no longer the norm, and thriving is. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you very much, Commander Yount. First-Class Cadet Holmstrup.

TESTIMONY OF FIRST CLASS CADET KYRA GRACE HOLMSTRUP,¹ UNITED STATES COAST GUARD ACADEMY, CLASS OF 2024

Cadet HOLMSTRUP. Good morning, Chair Blumenthal, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity for me to speak publicly today. I am First-Class Cadet Kyra Holmstrup, a senior at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and president of the Cadets Against Sexual Assault. While I respect and empathize with my fellow panelists here today, I want to be clear that their statements are their own, and I do not necessarily endorse all that they have to say. These are also my views and not the views of the Coast Guard or the Coast Guard Academy. I hope to share my story today to exemplify the progress that our Academy still must make, and I hope to humanize the many statistics on sexual assault we have become all too comfortable hearing. It has been a privilege to attend the Coast Guard Academy, and I am grateful to all those along the way who have helped me find my place within the Academy and the Coast Guard.

My story begins my second week as a cadet, during my freshman year. I had gotten close to a classmate in the same training platoon during Swab Summer. What I thought was an innocent ice cream date on campus turned into a sexual assault that has haunted me ever since. We are always told that you just have to say 'no,' but 'no' to him was an invitation to try again. I was 19. What I did not know then was that after making an unrestricted report out of fear for my safety, I would be thrown into the darkest year of my life. The process of my case was plagued by unenforced No Contact Orders (NCOs), a disconnect between myself and my Special Victims' Counsel, and false hope of the perpetrator being removed from campus.

My classmates stopped talking to me as I spiraled into a deep depression. We always talk about how trauma stems from the assault, but the reporting system continues to re-victimize, and causes trauma of its own. From my time as the president of Cadets Against Sexual Assault, I have seen the reporting process continue to revictimize those who courageously come forward, and force others to hide in the shadows until graduation.

With our new Coast Guard Academy leadership, there has been some progress made, but without your help, the Academy cannot continue to progress within the bounds that have been set by Congress. This Committee may not be able to solve sexual assault, but

¹The prepared statement of Cadet Holmstrup appears in the Appendix on page 61.

you can solve some of the barriers that we face. Today, I come with recommendations on how together, we can better the reporting system for cadets.

One, cadets who are kicked out on a Non-Judicial Punishment for assault or sexual harassment should not be allowed to enlist in any service. Two, No Contact Orders must be enforced on campus, through cadet regulations or administrative means, for the safety of all members involved. Three, we must readdress Section 539 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2021 that covered the separation of alleged victims and alleged perpetrators, with stakeholders and cadets from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, in order to better regulate our unique environment. Four, Special Victims' Counsels (SVCs) must be afforded the opportunity to review the entirety of the case file for their clients in order to give them the best counsel. Furthermore, SVCs should not be allowed to be first-year lawyers, and must have experience in a different realm of the Coast Guard before working with victims. And five, the U.S. Coast Guard Academy must adopt the Safe-To-Report Policy on collateral misconduct that each service academy follows.

Despite seeing the worst of the Coast Guard, I have also been lucky enough to experience the Coast Guard at its best through mentors, friends, and classmates. Truly, I am excited for the future Coast Guard that my class will serve in come May. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you very, very much. Mrs. Maro.

TESTIMONY OF CAITLIN E. MARO,¹ FORMER MEMBER OF UNITED STATES COAST GUARD ACADEMY, CLASS OF 2008

Ms. MARO. Good morning, Senator Blumenthal, Ranking Member Johnson, and distinguished Members of this Subcommittee. I want to thank you personally, Senator Blumenthal, for inviting me here today. I have been telling my story publicly for 17 years now, and I want to thank you for your interest in this critical issue. I told my story to your colleagues over in the U.S. House of Representatives back in 2006, and I am praying that today is the day that Congress takes action.

I entered the Academy in June 2004, but had no choice but to leave after one semester of study as my physical safety was at stake. The open secret that you are now privy to is that the Academy and the Coast Guard at large is fraught with cronyism, power addicts, and abusers. My written testimony contains the details of my experience while a freshman at the Academy, but the short of my story is that I was groped several times, sometimes with 30 laughing witnesses, and sexually harassed on a daily basis. The environment was so consuming that I would take my school assignments down to the baseball dugouts, in the dark, with a flashlight. After I reluctantly reported my assaults, I was simply asked by my company commander, "Is this worth investigating?" I told him, "I don't know." It was then that the matter was dropped.

In a later meeting, after an investigation was forced, the same company commander admitted that he did not start an investigation because, he "figured that it happened on a date. You do have blonde hair, and you wear makeup." Having no one to turn to and

¹The prepared statement of Mrs. Maro appears in the Appendix on page 67.

no one to help me, I decided to voluntarily resign in February 2005, after it became apparent that my career in the Coast Guard was over before it even began. My reputation was destroyed, and the trust that existed between me and my shipmates was gone.

Transparency and accountability in the U.S. Coast Guard and the Academy has never existed, and still does not exist today. I am here to tell you that that must change. To start, Operation Fouled Anchor needs to be made public. Accountability cannot happen until there is transparency. My personal FOIA request for the Operation Fouled Anchor report was denied over the summer. It was then that I went directly to the Coast Guard Academy itself for my own personal records. The current Assistant Commandant of Cadets, Commander Aaron Casavant, told me to submit a FOIA request for my personal documentation regarding my sexual assault. That is something that I am entitled to under the Privacy Act of 1974. Imagine that, a FOIA request for my own documents. I wonder what they are hiding in there?

As for accountability, the highest-ranking member of the Coast Guard, Admiral Linda Fagan, told your colleagues in the Commerce Committee in July that all victims that were listed in the Fouled Anchor report were notified. I am here to tell you that that is a lie. I was never contacted by the Coast Guard. I found out about my inclusion in Operation Fouled Anchor from a writer at CNN, in June 2023. I am the great-great-great-granddaughter of a drummer that led Union soldiers into battle at both Antietam and Gettysburg. I am the great-great-granddaughter of a Navy sailor that died on the Battleship Maine in Havana Harbor. There were others that served on both fronts, in both World Wars. I wanted to serve my country as they did. Admiral Fagan also told your colleagues that in all cases in which the Coast Guard had jurisdiction, that action was taken on perpetrators. Senators, my main perpetrator is currently a lieutenant commander in the Coast Guard. He is thriving in a career that I had hoped for. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you very much, Mrs. Maro. Lieutenant McCafferty.

TESTIMONY OF LIEUTENANT MELISSA MCCAFFERTY,¹ USCG, RET. UNITED STATES COAST GUARD ACADEMY, CLASS OF 2011

Lieutenant MCCAFFERTY. Senator Blumenthal, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Melissa McCafferty, and I am a retired lieutenant in the United States Coast Guard. At the foot of the Coast Guard Academy barracks is a monument with these words inscribed: Honor. Respect. Devotion to Duty. On its best days, many Coast Guard members live and breathe these core values. Unfortunately, there are many who do not.

While a freshman at the Academy, I experienced my first sexual assault. I was befriended by an upper-class male cadet, who invited me to go with him to New York City. Having grown up in a small village in Michigan, I had never been to the Big Apple, so I agreed. He told me that he had booked separate hotel rooms, but when I arrived, I discovered only one. It was then that I realized this per-

¹The prepared statement of Lieutenant McCafferty appears in the Appendix on page 70.

son was not my friend. Over the course of 3 days, he repeatedly raped me in that room.

When I returned to the Academy, I told no one. I feared that if I reported this incident, I would be the one to face discipline. My fears were not unfounded—I later witnessed the restriction of a classmate who was brave enough to report a rape. To add insult to injury, senior leaders at the Academy permitted her rapist to graduate and to receive his commission. To my knowledge, he is still serving today.

My second sexual assault occurred during my third year at the Academy. I was asleep in my room when an intoxicated classmate broke in, climbed into my bed, and began undoing his shorts. Thankfully, I was able to stop him. I escorted my classmate to his room, put him to bed, and never spoke of the incident.

My experiences are not isolated events. There are hundreds of similar stories within the Academy and throughout the fleet, involving officers and enlisted members alike. As a result, there exists a corrosive pattern of sexual assault, harassment, abuse, bullying, intimidation, and retaliation. This is insidious, this is pervasive, and this is continuing to this day. Throughout my career, I have personally experienced and observed behavior that leads me to this tragic conclusion—there is an incredibly strong correlation between our abusive culture and the continued failure by Coast Guard senior leaders to hold themselves and others accountable for abhorrent, and at times criminal, behavior.

What's worse, I have witnessed the harassment, bullying, and retaliation against Coast Guard members who have shown the integrity to speak up. After exercising integrity, they are often forced out of the organization. For some, including myself, when the abuse becomes so unrelenting, so omnipresent, and so insufferable, we seek relief in suicide. I survived my attempt. Tragically, many, many of my shipmates did not.

My purpose today is to bear witness to these problems through my own experiences and observations, and to lend my voice to those who have been silenced. It is an abject failure of integrity that senior leaders have concealed, condoned, and otherwise enabled this behavior to thrive. It is an abject failure of leadership that they have refused to address the systemic nature of this abuse. It is an absolute abject failure of character that they have continued to prioritize loyalty to themselves and to each other over that of our organization and our people. Through their continued failure to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions, senior leaders have abdicated their authority under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). They have failed to uphold Congressional and statutory mandates, and they have violated their oaths of office.

I have repeatedly witnessed senior leaders dismiss substantiated reports of harassment, assault, abuse, and retaliation in order to shield their fellow officers and friends from any form of discipline. As evidence of this, I direct your attention to the several failed attempts by senior leaders to bury these damaging reports. Perhaps the most visible example of this failure is the well-documented case of former Academy department head Glenn Sulmasy. As documented in the news, not only did senior leaders deliberately over-

turn prosecutorial recommendations from lawyers, they also knowingly concealed his behavior and falsely attested to his character by writing him a letter of recommendation. These actions enabled Sulmasy, a known sexual predator, to attain positions at two civilian colleges, first as a provost, and then as a president. Unfortunately, I count as one of his many victims.

In refusing to acknowledge and address the past, senior leaders have implicitly condemned the future. Make no mistake—I love this organization. I have spent half of my life fulfilling its missions, and working both for and with its people. My testimony today brings me no joy. That said, joy shall never eclipse integrity. While good people do exist in our organization, they are almost always outranked and overruled by the bad. In fulfilling our charge to protect humanity and to defend the Nation, Coast Guard senior leaders have failed to protect us against the worst of all enemies—ourselves. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Lieutenant McCafferty. Colonel Fenner.

**TESTIMONY OF COLONEL LORRY FENNER,¹ UNITED STATES
AIR FORCE, RETIRED**

Colonel FENNER. Good morning, Senator Blumenthal, Senator Johnson, Senator Butler. Thank you for inviting SWAN to speak with you today. As you mentioned, we represent very, very many active-duty women and women veterans, especially in working against sexual assault and for culture change. As you mentioned, I served in the Air Force, mostly in intelligence, but I taught two tours at the Air Force Academy as well. And my PhD is in military history, but part of my focus was on women in the military over time.

I am honored to be sitting here with these women—I am OK. It is unbelievable, but it is so important that you have them here today, because it emphasizes that this is not about esoteric policy and legislation. It is about real people, people who we care about and who are the foundation of the mission of safety and national security for our people.

For those of us who are older, this is like Groundhog Day. Unfortunately, something happens. Fortunately, it might come to our attention. Then we have a lot of energy, policy, legislation, and then we do what we call fire and forget. We think we have solved a problem, but as you have pointed out, and as these ladies have pointed out, these are persistent cultural problems that will continue. They will continue to emerge in the public eye. Because it is not in the news every day does not mean it is not happening every day. So us doing the same thing over and over again in that stack of reports is not going to solve the problem. What is missing? My longer testimony has some other suggestions, but what we can say is what you have started here today, and I am glad to hear that you are going to continue—sustained and intense oversight. Do not fire and forget. With the Coast Guard, with the complexities of authorities and responsibilities, this will be a whole of government, whole of Congress attempt at oversight, between committees

¹The prepared statement of Colonel Fenner appears in the Appendix on page 74.

and on both sides of Capitol Hill. DHS and DOD must work together. Sometimes they do, and inexplicably, sometimes they do not. It has to be from top to bottom, and I am so glad the new leadership at the Coast Guard Academy is reenergizing the Board of Visitors.

Title 14, Section 701 about cooperation can be readdressed, and Military Service Organizations (MSO) and Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) stand by to help you, but this must be a combined effort at oversight. Admiral Fagan asked for resources. Again, sometimes the services work together, and sometimes they are not. They should work together in military justice reform in the Offices of Special Trial Counsel (OSTC) and SVP establishment, and the oversight that the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPROs) are doing can be combined. The Coast Guard Academy, and actually the Merchant Marine Academy, should be included in DOD SAPRO's every 2-year report, and the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) does entertain the Coast Guard sometimes, but in their visits, they do not go to the Coast Guard Academy. That should be started.

Independent investigations are very important. Reporting and accountability are a circular problem. If there is not public naming and shaming, it will not come about. It is just about the perpetrators; as everyone has said, it is about the leaders. We must force ourselves into anticipatory leadership. You cannot just walk into a unit and be ignorant and be shocked that gambling is going on there. Don't be shocked. Don't wait until it hits you in the face. Don't do one more commander's call where you talk about zero tolerance. Don't force one more PowerPoint set of slides for training on people. We must be held accountable, and that will encourage reporting. If you don't have accountability, you don't have reporting. If you do not have reporting, you do not have accountability.

I would then also advocate for the Veteran Service Administration (VA) to do specific outreach. They are getting better at it. It is not perfect, it needs work, but specific outreach to Coast Guard Academy attendees and graduates from the 1970s on. Do that outreach that the Investigative Service said that it did but did not reach everybody. Make sure those women know what the VA offers now that the evidentiary standards for Military Sexual Trauma (MST) have changed, and that their claims will be more easily processed, and that they should take advantage of what those Veterans Service Organizations offer to help them with those claims. Please do not fire and forget this time. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Colonel Fenner. We are going to begin now with questions, but before we do, I just want to say this testimony is some of the most powerful I have heard in my entire term in the U.S. Senate, and I have heard a lot of powerful testimony. It is horrifying and heartbreaking, but it is also uplifting because of your courage, your strength and tenacity, and your determination to serve our country by bringing to light this problem, to improve a service that you love and that you have given your all to make better. You are right, Colonel Fenner; it is about real people. It is about real women. There is a saying, the cover-up is worse than the crime. The crime here was absolutely horrific, but the climate of cover-up encourages more of the crime.

I want to begin, Cadet Holmstrup, by asking you, do these problems persist? You are currently a cadet, first-class cadet at the Coast Guard, in your senior year. Do these problems persist?

Cadet HOLMSTRUP. Thank you, Senator, for that question. Cover-up, in my opinion, does not exist at the Coast Guard Academy with our current leadership. I think if there is time or a place for change within the Coast Guard and Coast Guard Academy, it is now. They have been very active with speaking with CASA, which is Cadets Against Sexual assault, and I am very optimistic for the future. High-schoolers that are coming into the Coast Guard Academy, Senator.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. When you say that they are active, is it matched by action? Are their good intentions matched by action that meets the problem?

Cadet HOLMSTRUP. Senator, I do not believe that there is any person within the Coast Guard Academy that believes that sexual assault is not a pervasive issue. In my written testimony that I submitted, I talked about how our assistant superintendent was able to secure a \$100,000 endowment for our Sexual Assault Prevention Response and Recovery (SAPRR) office, and \$40,000 of that was given or is going to CASA primarily. I do believe that there is some action, but like I will talk about today, there are some things that we need you to help with, some of the barriers that we really face and that we struggle with at the Academy.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. We should not depend on news organizations to report what is going on at the Coast Guard Academy, or the Coast Guard. We learned about the Fouled Anchor report only because CNN found out about it, reported on it, and has continued to report and uncover facts. I think the current leadership may have good intentions, but they are only going part of the way. The 90-day review does not name names. It does not achieve accountability, which every one of you have said is vital. What horrifies me is not only what happened to each of you, but also the fact that your attackers, some of them are still serving in positions of extraordinary responsibility and command.

Let me ask Commander Yount, what was your reaction to the disclosure of Fouled Anchor, and what did it tell you about the Academy, and what was your reaction to the 90-day review, Accountability and Transparency Review?

Commander YOUNT. I cannot say in public what my initial reaction was, sir. [Laughter.]

A little too salty, with all due respect. I was very angry. I could not believe it, quite frankly. I had hoped for much more from my Coast Guard after all these years. Maybe I had prayed for much more from my Coast Guard after all these years. To find out that, one, it was still true, but even worse, that they then covered it up was just absolutely the worst, and became extremely angry and then even more frustrated. Then a group of us older, grayer-haired veterans got together and built a coalition to start trying to fight the problem. That would be how the reaction was.

In seeing the report, you can see that I have this stack of reports here; if I could just talk about that. I am a little bit of a geek sometimes with some of this stuff, so I sort of carry some of these things around, which gosh knows why I do this. But we can go back to

a 2016 report, which was by Admiral Zukunft, the commandant then, talks about a culture of respect and that we have to relook at our core values. We can talk about the Diversity Report done by then-Commandant Schultz, talks about a culture of respect and needing to look at the core values. Oh, yes, I forgot to talk about this other hidden report. That is that Culture of Respect Report from 2015, which was also covered up.

Interestingly enough, that report was covered up, that was just released in conjunction with the Accountability and Transparency Report, the task force was actually put together with the intent to look at sexual assault training to address respect issues and to improve our culture. That was its purpose, ironically, and that was looked at from August 2011 to March 2012. The report was issued in April 2015, and that was hidden until the release of our report with the Accountability and Transparency Report.

When I look at this report and I look at all these other reports, I say to you, I do not believe it. What is different with this report than any of these other reports that have been done for the last many years, sir?

Senator BLUMENTHAL. There is no shortage of reports. It is a shortage of action.

Commander YOUNT. Yes, sir.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Let me ask you, Lieutenant McCafferty, you described that trip to New York that you took with a fellow cadet. One factor that impacts a cadet's decision to report or not to report is the fear of being punished for collateral misconduct, whether it is drinking or taking a trip with another cadet. Was that a fear among your fellow cadets in deciding not to report? I will ask the same question of others who are here.

Lieutenant MCCAFFERTY Thank you for that question, Senator. Yes, that was absolutely a fear of mine. I had knowingly gone to New York City with an upper-class cadet, and we have very strict fraternization rules. I was aware of that and I take responsibility, and for years I actually blamed myself for what happened because I made that decision. In terms of the culture, I had repeatedly over the years, my 4 years at the Academy, seen countless cadets penalized for minor infractions, I would argue minor infractions, that ultimately led to a sexual assault or rape.

I have witnessed male cadets, one of whom was date-raped, found in a basement completely naked. No one was ever held accountable, and he was restricted from imbibing alcohol. Another classmate was restricted, after reporting a rape, for drinking alcohol. Another classmate never reported a rape, because she, too, drank alcohol. The focus and the priorities belie logic here. Like you do not have to be a scientist to know that when a rape occurs, you do not blame the person for ingesting alcohol, no matter what the amount. In my case, even though I went to New York City, I was stone-cold sober. I had nothing to drink, but yet the fear they instill in us, and the ability to skate on any level of accountability, is breathtaking. They will use whatever means they can to downplay the action, and they will penalize the victim who speaks up with the courage and integrity to speak the truth.

Having worked for the commandant myself, I have worked in the front office. I have worked for these officers. I have seen these sen-

ior leaders in action. This culture is not isolated to the Academy. When I say senior leaders, I use those words deliberately. I use those words very precisely, because these senior leaders currently, and those who have since been honorably retired or quietly asked to resign, continue in this behavior. They continue to pick and choose which infraction to enforce and upon whom, many of which are defenseless enlisted members, young and midgrade officers. None of them, none of them are themselves.

I have attached in my written reports at least ten accounts from women currently in the fleet who have had countless times and interactions with admirals and above, documenting their behavior, their abhorrent behavior, and yet no one has come forward and held each other accountable. I am well aware this issue is not isolated to the Academy, and like my colleague Jenn has stated, it has been issued time and time and time again. In every single report, we have the data, we have the analytics, but the unspoken and the unwritten rule is the flag corps and the captains will look out only for themselves. They will not hold each other to accountability, and they will not exercise their authority under the UCMJ, and either they are incapable or otherwise unwilling to do so.

Every single time we have these discussions, we end up here today, promising future-oriented action. Faith in the Coast Guard within its own members is destroyed. It is not eroded; it is destroyed. The only way senior leaders can even hope to fix this is to go through every single member of the flag corps who was involved in these disgraceful cover-ups, to bring them out of retirement, which they have the authority to do, and to hold them accountable under the UCMJ.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. A central element of this cover-up, the culture of cover-up is blame the victim. It is one of the oldest tactics in denying justice for sexual assault. I am going to turn to the Ranking Member, but let me just assure everyone here, so far as this Committee is concerned, we are not going to fire and forget. We are going to pursue what you have told us and make sure that there is accountability. Senator Johnson?

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to second what you said earlier. I have been here more than 12 years, and this is probably some of the most powerful, important, and on-point testimony I have heard. You have done an extraordinary job under a difficult situation laying out what the facts are and what the problem is, plus what the solution is. It is accountability. It is exposure. It is naming and shaming. It is pretty obvious what has to be done, and it is also pretty obvious that it has not been done. You can only talk about improving culture so long before you actually start doing it, and the only way to do it, again, accountability, exposure, the truth, naming and shaming.

Here is my disconnect. I am a father; I have daughters. I have a sister. I cannot even watch a rape scene in a movie, much less even begin to contemplate what it is like to be raped. OK? It is horrific. Murder is bad, but it ends, right? Rape just continues. It is a horrific crime against another person. You have men serving in these commands. I do not understand why they do not come to grips with this why they are not outraged. Listen, I am sure there are instances where it is kind of there are he-said, she-said. I un-

derstand the difficult nature of some of this stuff, but some of this is so clear-cut, and you have got DNA evidence, that type thing. Can somebody explain that to me?

The other disconnect is I think almost to a person, you are saying you love the Coast Guard, so there is obviously good elements there. There are obviously—and I would hope the vast majority are good people that are serving there, they are patriots, defending our freedom and look out for each other. Can you get down to the core of why this has been allowed to go on? I will start with you, Commander Yount.

Commander YOUNT. Wow.

Senator JOHNSON. Does the question even make sense to you?

Commander YOUNT. The question makes sense. I am not sure that I have an answer. I would say from my experience particularly as a cadet, there were two things that were really predominant. Certainly one is alcohol. A lot of the experiences were definitely alcohol-based, and—

Senator JOHNSON. But that is what might have led to the instance. I am talking about, why the cover-up?

Commander YOUNT. Right. Oh, the cover-up.

Senator JOHNSON. In our era.

Commander YOUNT. Yes.

Senator JOHNSON [continuing]. And you mentioned in your testimony that there was certainly an attitude back then that women do not belong here.

Commander YOUNT. Right. Oh, yes.

Senator JOHNSON. Does that attitude still continue, I mean decades later?

Commander YOUNT. You would have to ask Kyra that one.

Cadet HOLMSTRUP. Senator, if I may, that attitude does not continue.

Senator JOHNSON. OK, good.

Cadet HOLMSTRUP. My class is 40 percent female, and our top cadets in our class are female as well. I would like to touch on a little bit of what your question is asking. Men are outraged as well. Men and women are both victims of sexual assault in the Coast Guard, and I have many mentors who are men who are supporting me today, and who were outraged when they heard about my story. I do not think that there is anyone in the Coast Guard that is not outraged about this. But talking a little bit more about our culture, we have this saying; it is called ship, shipmate, self. First, you have to take care of the ship, and then you have to take care of your shipmates, and then you can finally take care of yourself. Really, what I saw, and still see today, is with your peers. When you come forward and talk about an assault that has occurred, especially in my case—he was a popular basketball player—his friends came to my room and they said, you are going to ruin his life.

Senator JOHNSON. Yes, he kind of ruined yours.

Cadet HOLMSTRUP. Exactly. That was my argument—

Senator JOHNSON. You are also a shipmate.

Cadet HOLMSTRUP. I am.

Senator JOHNSON. Ms. Maro, in your testimony, it was striking—but when I needed them to testify to what they had witnessed, they were silent.

Ms. MARO. Yes, they were.

Senator JOHNSON. I mean you had other people you had helped, and then when you needed them to come forward to testify—and my guess is that is common, and that is really sort of the heart of this is, why—I mean is it literally I am not going to get a promotion? Again, sure, ship, shipmate, but you are a shipmate, too, so that one does not quite explain it. There is something else going on here, like *omertá*. Help me understand that. Why did your friends not come forward and say, this is wrong, we need to end this, we need to expose this? Again, accountability, exposure, name and shame. These people have to be drummed out of the service so this does not happen anymore. Again, you make some very public examples of a few people, and by and large that is going to go a long way toward solving this problem, but they have not done that. They have not even begun to do that, years, decades later. Talking about changing the culture, but they are not doing the one thing that has to be done. I'm filibustering, sorry.

Ms. MARO. It is OK. You are making way too much sense, Senator. I have those very same questions. To piggyback off of what Kyra had just mentioned about her perpetrator's friends coming to her room to intimidate her, the same thing happened with me. In this particular instance where I had accused the now-lieutenant commander, who was a fourth-class with me when I was assaulted, I was groped in a group, in a room with 30 of my peers, and they watched, and they laughed. These are people, like I said in my testimony, who I had quite literally pushed over the wall in the obstacle course, or literally carried on my back during swim tests. Imagine that, people joining the Coast Guard who do not know how to swim. I had to carry them on my back. When it came time for them to speak up about what they had seen, they were so fearful that they kept their mouth shut. It just plays into the culture of cynicism that exists, and I cannot imagine that it has changed very much, because there is that deep fear of losing your career, like I did. I was the one that was pushed out instead.

Senator JOHNSON. Mr. Chair, my time is up, but again I think largely the solution is known. It is what we are doing here. It is accountability. The only time you get accountability is you have to expose it. You need to tell the truth, and you have to tell the truth about individuals, and they are going to have to be held accountable, and they are going to have to pay a penalty for doing this. If we do that effectively, hopefully we can impact this to a significant degree. But we need to use every power we have as Congress, and we have allowed those powers of oversight to atrophy. We cannot allow that anymore. I mean across the board on these investigations, we need to demand accountability from these agencies, and we start here at the Coast Guard. Again, I appreciate you holding this. Again, I cannot tell you how impactful this testimony is. We have to do something about it, OK? We know what we need to do.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. What you see here is bipartisan agreement. [Laughter.]

Exceedingly rare.

Senator JOHNSON. That was very powerful testimony, OK?

Senator BLUMENTHAL. It is the result of your powerful testimony, and I am very grateful for your supporting this inquiry. Part of what we are trying to do is create safe spaces for this kind of bearing witness. Again, I appreciate your coming forward, and accountability is beginning here. Senator Butler.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR BUTLER

Senator BUTLER. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of the witnesses who have come, and to those of you in the audience who have come to support them. What they are doing in sharing their stories and telling the truth about some of the most powerful organizations in our country is not an easy task. All of you are here in support of them, letting them know that in this moment, when others have failed them, you continue to stand with them, and so I want to appreciate all of you who are here in their support.

A couple of questions that I have. Mr. Chair, I want to get to my questions, but I also do not want to lose the opportunity to note that I respect our Ranking Member and his having frustrations, and his freedom to share those frustrations. At the start of opening remarks, while I recognize that I am the newest member of this Subcommittee, the most junior senator, and I also happen to be the only woman sitting on this dais. I understand that there are frustrations abound in terms of the work that we all have to do on behalf of our constituency, and the most that we could do is to honor that these witnesses have come here to share their testimony, and allow them to get those stories out that they have prepared so nervously to offer.

As the only woman sitting on this dais, I did not want to lose the opportunity—I would correct that to say, abdicate my responsibility to speak on behalf of the women who are here and those who are watching, to honor their stories, to honor their time, and honor their preparation getting to that. To the survivors who are here, you have shared a lot about your recommendations for things that this body could do and how Congress could join you in partnership to begin to orient toward action in addressing these challenges. I thank you for being specific in offering those recommendations.

A question that I have is relative to what happens after the assaults, after you have made the courageous choice and decision to report. After you have been repeatedly victimized by the reporting structures and systems that you are obligated to abide by. What happens to you? What are the kinds of support services, including mental health support, did you receive in the time, and what kinds of services would you advocate that we include in our action-oriented continued oversight of this issue? I would love to start with Ms. Maro.

Ms. MARO. Thank you for your question. I hope I answer it completely, so you can let me know if you want me to expound. I reluctantly came forward. I was dedicated to keeping my mouth shut, because I knew what would have happened if I accused shipmates of what they had done. I had confided in a civilian professor by accident. I was going to him for help because I was struggling with my schoolwork, and told him that I was extremely unhappy, that

I hated it here, that I wanted to leave, and told him about what I was experiencing daily in the barracks. He told me, well, you know I am obligated to report this, correct? My heart just sank to my feet, because I knew what was going to happen to me after. Actually, to my surprise, nothing much came of it until maybe like two, —my memory is fuzzy, but it was not immediate.

I had to answer to company commander, who then asked me if this was worth investigating. I said no, and then when later the investigation was forced, he proceeded to bring everyone, all the 30 people who were in the room at the time in for an interview, which meant that all my classmates knew exactly what I had accused one of the other shipmates of. I would have doors slammed in my face. The rumor mill ran rampant. The rumors were so ugly. It destroyed my reputation. I had no one to turn to. I was mocked in the hallway, and it just became so heavy that I just decided to leave. I was like, there is no way I am going to be able to function in the service without support from my shipmates. The bullying and the retaliation it is crushing.

Senator BUTLER. I see the pain still on your face. Thank you. Cadet Holmstrup, you talked about your leadership role currently in CASA, and you were very specific in the recommendations that you thought that Congress should take. Can you talk to me about the mental health services and other kinds of post-traumatic supports that you feel like are necessary as a continued, sort of action-oriented package?

Cadet HOLMSTRUP. Yes, Senator. Thank you for that question. Really, what I have to say echoes what Caitlin just said. I also did not want to come forward about my case. Finally, a couple of weeks after the assault, I asked a CASA member, who was a firsty, to come and talk to me, and she stood in my room, and we had to have the door open. As I was telling her what had happened, I heard someone walk outside my door and stop, and that is when I stopped talking and I said that I think he is outside. She walked outside and there was the perpetrator, listening to my story. I was in fear, because he was my next-door neighbor, and he had a very angry outburst so the next day, I went and I made an unrestricted report to our duty officer. They did everything right. They informed everyone in my chain of command. They went through the entire checklist that they now have to do, and I was offered an SVC, a lawyer. I got in touch with a victim advocate, who saved my life, quite frankly, and then I got to talk to a chaplain. When I went to talk to that chaplain, he asked me who assaulted me, and I told him and he said: Oh, no. He is such a good guy. Then he proceeded to talk about how his kids were adopted from the same agency. I did not go back, but I did speak with the counselors on campus, and I have for 3 years now. We do have some measures in place of support, and quite frankly, as CASA president, I have healed by helping others get through this process.

To answer your question, we do have a lot of measures in place to support victims and survivors after they report, but like I reference in my written testimony, we still need to buttress some of those.

Senator BUTLER. Thank you so much. My last, just quick comment, Mr. Chair. I have a 9-year-old daughter, and if she is so for-

tunate to have examples like you fighting to create a better Coast Guard, I would be excited for her to join. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Senator Butler. Senator Hawley.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR HAWLEY

Senator HAWLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks to you and the Ranking Member for holding this hearing today. Thank you for each of you; thank you for being here. Thank you for your courage. Thank you for your service to our country, first of all, and thank you for serving your country today by being here today to shine light and expose what has happened. I want to say, I cannot believe we are sitting here today. First of all, words fail me in saying what has happened to each of you and offering condolences. That does not begin to cut it, but I also cannot believe the extent of the cover-up for years and years and years and years. I also cannot believe, Mr. Chair, that the Coast Guard has had this report since 31 January, 2020, and they sit on it for 3-plus years and deliberately conceal it from us. I mean deliberately.

Ms. Maro, I wanted to ask you about something you said in your written testimony. I cannot imagine what this was like for you. You said you found out from CNN that your case was included in Operation Fouled Anchor—I just want to read what you said here—“not from an Academy representative, not from Coast Guard Investigative Service (CGIS), not from Congress. The news was broken to me by the press over the phone, while I was wiping my child’s runny nose.” Tell us what it is like to, frankly, be betrayed in that way, such that you have a member of the press—which thank goodness they got it; thank goodness whomever was the whistleblower, whomever leaked it to them, because otherwise, we probably still would not know about it. Just tell us what that was like, to get a call and say, hey, by the way, there is this report that you have never heard of, and your case is in it; do you have a comment?

Ms. MARO. Yes, I have several. I would like to start by saying that I wish I could put that whistleblower on my Christmas card list for the rest of my life, because without that whistleblower—something that I have thought that I had put to bed decades ago was just resurrected. I had been minding my own business the last several decades. I left the Academy, have not had careers like the other ladies up here. I am living a blissfully average life with my husband and my children in Tennessee. In a mom bun and my dirty leggings, my very good friend sent me a link in my text messages, saying, look at this CNN article. Were you not at the Academy during this time period? Again, my heart hit my feet, and I read the report, and I immediately contacted the CNN reporter. She immediately contacted me back and said, I have been looking for you. Your name is in this report; I have been looking for you. It was clear to me that even though I had been in therapy all those years that I had not healed.

Like I mentioned in my testimony, I was wiping my son’s runny nose, with my phone up my ear like this, listening to her tell me this, and I still do not have words. I have been suffering since June, since I heard. Went back into therapy and finally found a

great counselor, who diagnosed me with complex post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). That was very freeing, so this has in many ways been a blessing for me, because I finally have a diagnosis for the things that I thought were just personality quirks these last 20 years. It was actually, in fact, PTSD. I do not know if that answered your question fully; I am happy to expound.

Senator HAWLEY. It does.

No, you bet it does. Can I ask you about something that you said a few minutes ago? Talking about back when you were at the Academy, talking about carrying people on your back in the pool, pushing them up over the walls in the obstacle course, and then none of them would come forward and support you. You said something that really struck me—you said, they were fearful, they were so fearful. Tell us about that dynamic. What were they fearful of, and why?

Ms. MARO. Frankly, they were fearful of the stripes on leaders' shoulders. The bigger the stripes, the bigger the threat. We all know this.

Senator HAWLEY. Walk us through that. What was the threat? If they supported you and they said, yes, she is telling the truth, what would happen?

Ms. MARO. You would be blacklisted in a way. I do not know how else to better explain that. Every person that has gotten into a service academy knows how difficult it is, and how driven and how hardworking you have to be to get there. It is not like the normal acceptance routine that most kids have to go through to get into colleges. They are very special people. They are talented, they are hardworking, and they are smart. To get there, you had to work your tail off, and to stay there, you have to work equally as hard, and it was a lot to lose. To be kicked out, thrown on the streets without any VA help, for depression or suicidal thoughts, it is crushing. I had to start over from square one. Like I said in my written testimony, I had several National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I rowing scholarships. I chose to go to the Coast Guard Academy to serve my country. I even turned down the Naval Academy to go there, too. Then after one semester, I am out on the streets, so to speak. It was a lot to lose.

Senator HAWLEY. Yes, it is. Help us understand the culture. Leadership, they do not want to hear it, right? There is retaliation. There are repercussions. If somebody supports you, they are going to get blacklisted because the leadership does not want to deal with the problem, or they do not want to—explain that piece of it to us.

Ms. MARO. I will do my best—

Senator HAWLEY. Why was leadership in your case not saying, this is unbelievable. This is terrible. This is probably a crime. For many of you, it is a crime, what you described. Sexual assault is a crime. Rape is a crime. It is not just bad behavior; it is criminal behavior. Help us understand the culture that says, oh, we are going to see no evil, hear no evil, look the other way, we do not want to deal with it, such that if you press the issue and you say, no, actually, I was assaulted, actually, I was raped, they say, we have to silence you. We have to shut this down. We cannot deal with this. Why is that? I mean help us get into the mindset, their mindset—to the best you can, their mindset.

Ms. MARO. Keep in mind, I was only there for one semester, so my experience is going to be a little bit more limited than the other ladies up here. But like others have touched on, there is this fear of retaliation, and then the Academy itself is an incredibly—especially your freshman year, is an incredibly strong pressure cooker-type environment. When I was there, you were not allowed to have cell phones. You were not allowed to have iPods, when they were back a thing. There is no music, there is no connection to the outside world, and you have to eat on squares. I do not know if you guys know what that is. You are braced up. You have to have your eyes in the book. There is no relief from this pressure, and I forget exactly where I was going with that. Excuse me. But so this pressure cooker-type environment just creates this difficulty in trying to—you are just taking care of yourself. You are in like survival mode, so to speak. It is hard to see someone suffer and then to speak out about it, because it also might spotlight you as well. If you are guilty of consuming alcohol underage, or guilty of doing something that would merit a demerit, you just keep your mouth shut. I cannot handle demerits on my record, I have bad grades, or I just do not want to spotlight myself. So think that is in a roundabout way, and I hope that answers your question.

Senator HAWLEY. It does, and I do not want to monopolize the time, Mr. Chair, I would be interested, actually, in the response to that question from everybody. Is it OK, Mr. Chair?

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Yes, please, go ahead, Lieutenant McCafferty.

Lieutenant MCCAFFERTY. Yes. Senator Hawley, I will try to make this as macrolevel as possible, given my 12 years of experience at literally every single level within the organization, from my fourth-class year as a cadet to the front office of Commandant Advisory Group. I served on the front office staff on the Commandant's Advisory Group for Admiral Zukunft, from 2016 until I ultimately was medically retired in 2019 for sustained PTSD. What I observed directly in Headquarters at that office, where I am surrounded by the cream of the crop of senior leaders, is that they implement safeguards within each other, for each other, and I call these people the gatekeepers. Time and time again, I would go to these gatekeepers, my immediate boss, who was an 05, a commander, and an 06, a captain. I would come to them with legitimate problems backed by reams and reams of data.

Example: 2016, we had a retention problem then, and it has only gotten worse. I tried to bring this to the awareness of Admiral Zukunft and was told outright not to do it. Those gatekeepers prohibited access to him so that they did not have to give him bad news, and the reason they did this is because they were up for promotion. I hate to say it. I honestly hate to be the one to call this out, but this is the reality. This is it. This is the reason. They just want to promote. They want to make the next rank. They want to become a captain. The captains want to become an admiral, and they want to join that so-called esteemed and privileged club. That is exactly what it is, and they do not care about the carnage left in their wake. They do not care about their loyalty to the oath. They do not care. They want to make the next rank, and I have seen it in the fleet, at the Academy, at the senior-most levels, and

I have seen it time and time and time and again. While I really do applaud my colleague's optimism in that it is better, I have seen the reality, and I have not been out that long. I retired in 2019, at the pinnacle of my career, having saved with my teams nearly 17,000 people. Yet this organization, these senior leaders who are still here, refuse to do something they could easily do tonight.

Should Admiral Fagan be genuine in her ability and her action to do something, she could recall every single one of those senior leaders tonight. She could charge them under her authority given to her via the UCMJ, and she could hold them accountable. But the unspoken and the unwritten rule that I have learned from my own experiences—and again, I need to caveat this that not everyone in the flag corps, not all captains are bad. Many, many are good. But the ones in power, the ones who make the decisions, the ones who overrule convictions, criminal convictions are the ones who often stay the longest and rise the ranks to the highest point.

Then when you add in the complexity of a gatekeeper, an O6, a one-star, or a commander, they are simply not getting the information that they need. That is the reality of the situation. It comes down to individual ego and ambition, and their need and desire to promote for power.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Senator Hawley. I think we have time for some additional questions. I am going to ask some, and then yield to my colleagues if they have any. Let me begin by asking you, Lieutenant McCafferty, about a specific instance that I think proves your point. There have been public reports that the Coast Guard leadership declined to court-martial former Coast Guard Academy professor Captain Glenn Sulmasy after he was found to have had inappropriate communications with a student, even though investigators recommended charges for conduct unbecoming an officer, and willful dereliction of duty. I think you experienced harassment from Captain Sulmasy. Let me ask you about that experience. What does the decision not to prosecute tell you about this culture of cover-up?

Lieutenant MCCAFFERTY. I think that what has happened with Glenn Sulmasy—and forgive me; I no longer address him as captain, because frankly I do not think he deserves the level of respect according to that position, so I just call him Glenn Sulmasy—but I think that is the perfect example. It is a most visible example. It is certainly one of the most well-documented examples. Here you have a situation where a captain, a United States Coast Guard active-duty captain, who was a dean of the humanities department, over years not only reached out to cadets inappropriately, touched them inappropriately, and God forbid, to my knowledge—and I cannot confirm or deny this, because it was just through the rumors—had sexual intercourse with these cadets as well, continued to do it with impunity for years. When I first started having interactions with Glenn Sulmasy, I reported it. I reported it to a midlevel officer at the Academy, and the impression I received from that conversation was the reality is, reporting aside, he is untouchable. He is protected at very high levels, and we know this is happening. We are aware of it, they are aware of it, and nothing will be done.

When I learned that he had—and this is the only reason why I am here today—like my colleague, I was finally at a place phys-

ically, emotionally, mentally, to put all of this behind. It took me almost 4 years after my suicide attempt to regain any semblance of composure and rationality and reality. The impacts were devastating. I cannot understate that it was devastating, and the only reason why I am here today is because a classmate sent me a news article that Glenn Sulmasy was opening a women's college. A known sexual predator within our organization, documented, verified, substantiated, was not only allowed to retire with honors and a government pension, they then wrote him a letter of recommendation endorsing his integrity and his character, and they continued to protect him.

The sad reality is, I have received communications from civilians who have been impacted by his conduct. We knowingly let a sexual predator into the world to become in another position of power at not just one, but two colleges, where multiple women have been impacted. If this is not a textbook case of exactly what I am mentioning, I honestly do not know what is. To my knowledge, as of today they have still done nothing. They could bring him back, and even if they could not substantiate charges under rape or sexual assault, or retaliation or bullying, or the numerous articles outlined in the UCMJ, they could easily charge him with conduct unbecoming of. They could easily charge him with dereliction of duty. They choose not to, and that is the problem right there, in its essence, at its core.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Ms. Maro, I was struck by your telling us that the Coast Guard would not give you your own records, and then by your question, what are they hiding? I think that is the question that lingers here, and will linger after this testimony, and will be the challenge for this Committee, and will be a focus for this Committee in demanding the emails that go to the reasons, for example, as Senator Hawley said, that 3½ years the Fouled Anchor report was withheld. It was the result of an investigation that started in 2014. It took 6 years to complete, even though it was covering only a limited time period and a limited number of cases. Then from January 2020 to June 2023, nothing—until CNN disclosed it. If CNN had not disclosed it, we might still not know about it. Maybe talk a little bit about what you think this concealment of your records, and other facts that are important for us to know, means to us.

Ms. MARO. Thank you for that question. I appreciate the chance to answer that. The Fouled Anchor report came out, I found out about it, and I immediately filed a FOIA request for that report. It was denied. Like I mentioned, at that point I reached out directly to the Coast Guard Academy, just trying to do my best to gather as much about my file as possible. I got some of it. It was clear that there was a lot missing, because the very last piece of paper that was in that 132-page file, by the way, and I was only there for a semester, was this email.

It was from the then-civilian professor that I confided in, to my company commander. Called me unstable in this email to my company commander, and then at the very end, he has a very small aside at the bottom saying fourth-class stopper, mentioned something about sexual harassment and assault in the barracks. I trust that you are looking into this. At the bottom, there is a hand-

written note from my company commander, looks like to then-Assistant Commandant of Cadets Commander Pulver, saying, this turned out not to be about sexual harassment but a dispute with her first-class division lead, who would not let her boyfriend study with her during study hour.

My company commander, who wrote that note, never talked to me about this. He never got that information from me, and this was the last thing that was in my file. I noticed that the rest of the investigation that supposedly happened was not in there. I went back to the person, Amanda Tiessen, at the academy, asking her where the remainder was, and then all of a sudden, I find myself talking to the current assistant commandant of cadets, Commander Casavant, who told me to submit a FOIA for my own personal records. I share your frustration with the FOIA process, Senator Johnson, because if I FOIA'd it, they would have reserved the right to redact anything and everything. But even that aside, I should not have to FOIA for my own documents. They are mine; they belong to me.

Further, to expound on that, I was working with a staff member on the Commerce Committee after the hearing that they held in July with Admiral Fagan, and she had her boots on the ground in August, I believe, at the Academy to investigate what came up. The Academy released part of that investigation to her, without my express permission. So the Academy will release documentation to Congress without my permission, or an individual's permission, but they will not release it to me.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. I have one more question, because I know we are going to hear from people, oh, you know, this is really regrettable, it is too bad that members of the Coast Guard had to go through this horrific experience, and frankly, we get this comment a lot—do you not have better things to do? Do you not have more important things? This is about our national security. The Coast Guard is a military service. They not only rescue people who are desperate at sea, they interdict illegal drugs. You provide essential national security services. The Coast Guard is a really important military security institution, and let me just ask Colonel Fenner, as an Air Force veteran, not a member of the Coast Guard but as a historian and scholar—would you agree that this issue is a national security and national defense issue?

Colonel FENNER. Absolutely, sir, and thank you for the question. As a historian, it is shocking, but it is not new. It is shocking that it has continued for so long. But to speak to national security—again I have the DOD background—as Secretary Austin has emphasized over his short tenure, the people are the thing. The people drive the ships. The people rescue the other people. The people fire the weapons. If you do not take care of your people and their families, then you have this recruiting problem, this retention problem, this readiness problem, all of the associated problems of mental health and depression. Then do you have an effective, ready force to put in the field, under stress and under fire? No, we do not.

Taking care of all the people, the young men who have had these experiences that are not sitting here, the families who have dealt with the aftermath of their loved ones being assaulted and ostracized in this way, all of us are affected. It is from time immemorial,

Senator Johnson, that one can ask themselves, where are these people with daughters and wives and sisters, and sons in some cases, who are not outraged, who are not taking proactive actions? That is to me as shocking as it is to you, sir, that everybody knows somebody, and yet nobody knows anybody.

On the plus side, a historical story. In the 1940s, women were part of preparedness movements, and they made up their own uniforms so they could be militaristic, and they were going to do home-front things. All of the generals on the Joint Staff did not want women in the services, to actually serve, and in our case exactly, in the reserves. Then the daughters started talking to their fathers, and all of a sudden, a whole bunch of generals were converted to agreeing to put women in the military. How do we affect the fathers and the brothers and the spouses? In my case of sexual harassment, as a faculty member, it was my male colleagues who helped report and supported me. When the men get as interested in this problem on a larger scale as the women are, we might see change in a positive direction. Thank you, sir.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. Senator Johnson, if you have any questions.

Senator JOHNSON. Yes, thanks, Mr. Chairman. Yes, I would hope back then, the 40s, the rationale of trying to keep women out of the service was because they wanted to protect them. Right? Now women are showing how valuable they are, and we are still not doing a very good job protecting them, OK?

Colonel FENNER. That is exactly right, sir. We were trying to protect them from the enemy, and yet the enemy within is the problem now.

Senator JOHNSON. Ms. Maro, I hope you are successful in your FOIA request, but my guess is if you are, that is what you are going to get. Mr. Chair, so what I would suggest, the first subpoena we should issue, and we ought to not wait, is subpoena the records to be delivered to Ms. Maro. Not to the Committee, but to Ms. Maro. She deserves to have her service records, and she deserves to have them now. I would request that we, if it is possible, to subpoena delivered to somebody else. Again, this is a private issue. She can get that and she can do whatever she wants to, but she deserves those service records. I would request we issue that subpoena.

I would also say because we have someone currently serving here, First-Class Cadet Holmstrup—we have all kinds of whistleblower protections in law, and they are not very effective. It is really sick, quite honestly, how effective and pervasive retaliation is against people, courageous people that come forward and report to Congress. I want to make sure that the Coast Guard, the services are on notice that this Committee will not tolerate any retaliation against any witness here. I think that is extremely important.

Then the last thing, I just again want to talk about how effective and important this testimony was. I had my opening question, just basically asking why. I mean, why does somebody not step forward? In answering Senator Hawley's question, particularly talking about your case, Ms. Maro, if you are the commandant there looking for a promotion, and all of a sudden you see this scandal that could erupt, where a female cadet is groped while 20 other cadets

witnessed it and giggled about it. Now you are going to lose a class—what, about 20, 30, maybe more individuals? I am not condoning it at all, but you helped me understand why this has not been addressed when it is all about promoting, and boy, is that going to be a stain on my career. I do not want to be the commandant of the Academy when that scandal erupted. I would imagine there is an awful lot of pressure.

Again, not condoning it all, but thank you again for your testimony. You have gotten me to understand a whole lot more about what the problem is, but again, as witnesses you have all basically said the solution here is accountability, which requires exposure, which requires the truth, which requires this Committee to be absolutely dedicated to subpoenaing and making sure that these records are made available so we can expose it, we can get the truth, and there can be accountability. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Senator Johnson.

Senator Hawley.

Senator HAWLEY. I want to follow up on something that you said, Mr. Chair. You said a second ago that this is about our national security, which I completely agree with. But you know what? It is also about the integrity of our government. It is one thing to have corporate leaders come in here and sit where you are sitting and lie to us, and frankly, they do it all the time. We have people come into this hearing room and lie to us constantly, mislead us, withhold information, lie to us, but when our own government does it, it is to say that it is unacceptable does not begin—we ought to have the salty language you were talking about earlier, Commander. I mean we could not keep this hearing PG and say what needs to be said.

The fact that these people, this leadership commissioned this report in 2014, which was itself too late, and sat on it for years, and not just sat on it but actively worked to conceal it, is unbelievable. I want to say—I am glad we have press here—I want to say for the leadership of the Coast Guard, it is not acceptable. I do not want to hear—I do not want to see any more memos from you where you say, oh, we have to work on our culture. No, no, no, we are past that point now.

You have lied to us. They lied to you. They have lied to the American people. They need to sit where you are sitting, take the oath, and explain to the country what has gone on. That is what needs to happen. I do not want to hear any more of it. I do not want to hear any more of the softly worded memos. I do not want to hear any more of the, we will do better next time. We are past all of that. We are past that. They have broken our trust. Frankly, when you see the trust constantly broken at institution after institution in this government, it is no wonder that people across this country just are in despair, regardless of their politics. It is unbelievable. Ms. Maro, you wanted to make a comment; I will yield my time to you.

Ms. MARO. I appreciate that. Thank you, Senator. To piggyback off of what you just said, Senator Hawley, and what Senator Johnson's final remarks were, I think we should all take a moment to reflect on the idea that Linda Fagan, the commandant of the Coast Guard, the first woman commandant of the Coast Guard—we

should be here like cheering that, right? That is exciting. She has a chance to make this right. But I also think it is most important for us to sit and think about that her predecessor left her with this report, Operation Fouled Anchor, in her inbox. She was left to hold this bag from her predecessor, Karl Schultz. He is in retirement right now, sipping mai tais on a beach somewhere. I do not know, whatever retired admirals do in their free time on retirement. I am not sure. But I think that both Admiral Schultz and Admiral Fagan should come in here and explain to you all, first of all, Admiral Fagan's inconsistencies to her testimony to the Commerce Committee, where she said that everyone was contacted, and that everyone on which she had jurisdiction over was punished. My assailant is a lieutenant commander, was not punished. I was in Fouled Anchor. I was not contacted. I think that she should come in here and explain herself, and I also think that Admiral Schultz should come in here and explain himself, and why he left Operation Fouled Anchor on her inbox. That is all I have to say. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Mrs. Maro. You have read our minds. We are certainly going to pursue those two individuals and others, and I am really heartened by the bipartisan support that we have for this continued effort. Senator Hassan?

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR HASSAN

Senator HASSAN. Thank you, Chair Blumenthal and Ranking Member Johnson for holding this important hearing and for those comments just now. More importantly, thank you to all of our witnesses for your willingness to come before the Committee today and testify about your experiences, which shows true courage and bravery. We are really grateful for that.

I am deeply disturbed, as are the other Members of this Committee, by the Coast Guard's inadequate and unjust response to sexual assaults and harassment at the Coast Guard Academy and within the service. It took nearly 40 years for the Coast Guard and the Academy to take a hard look at its culture and processes for addressing sexual assault, and another 6 to 7 years to complete its investigation. Then it took the agency another 2½ years to release the findings of its investigation. Whether it stems from negligence or malfeasance, it is unacceptable that the Coast Guard buried the Operation Fouled Anchor report for so long. The women and men of the Coast Guard, who commit their lives to their country and to keeping all of us safe, secure, and free, deserve a system that treats victims with dignity and fairness, is committed to holding wrongdoers accountable, and recognizes that a Coast Guard that treats women as second-class citizens fails to uphold American values, and undermines its own mission as a result.

With that, I did want to ask a question. I know from others who have been following this hearing all morning that a number of my questions have been answered, so I am not going to make you go through all of that again. But I did want, Cadet Holmstrup, to start with you. In your testimony, you explained how your attacker was able to continue to harass you, including violating a No Contact Order, even after you made an unrestricted report to the Academy. You also noted that the Academy's poor handling of your ini-

tial report and your reports of ongoing harassment contributed to your trauma. How could the Academy better uphold its responsibility to protect victims from continued harassment, and renew trust in the Sexual Misconduct Reporting and Adjudication Process?

Cadet HOLMSTRUP. Thank you, Senator, for that question. I do believe that there are many things that were dropped during my case. One of those things that I ask for in my written testimony is about Special Victims' Counsels. I did not have the ability to understand what was going on with my case. I, like Caitlin, have to FOIA for my case packet. I have not seen the entirety of it as well, and neither did my SVC, my lawyer at the time, so he was not able to fully prepare me for what I was going into.

The No Contact Order was very difficult as well, because when I tried to communicate with my command what was going on, they said, he is going to be out soon. That was kind of my response, until the National Defense Authorization Act of 2021.

Senator HASSAN. Helpful to know. Still work to be done. I had one other follow-up, and you all can each answer it or choose not to, but what kind of pressure, if any, did you face from the institution related to how you made your report? What kind of pushback did you get? We will start with you, and we will just go right down the line.

Commander YOUNT. Senator, as I stated, I received demerits for having the door broken. I did not make a report, because I received demerits for a door broken and I thought, that is what they think of this.

Senator HASSAN. Right. That is the signal they sent, right?

Commander YOUNT. Yes, ma'am.

Senator HASSAN. Yes, OK. Cadet.

Cadet HOLMSTRUP. Senator, I felt very much supported by my command when I made my report. They sent it up the chain correctly. They hit everything on the checklist. I was investigated by the Coast Guard Investigative Services. However, it was the aftermath of it and some of the policies that Congress enacted that really hindered my case and contributed to that trauma.

Senator HASSAN. Thank you. Ms. Maro.

Ms. MARO. I did not receive necessarily any demerits or any specific sorts of punishment, but I did, as things started to progress during my investigation, get comments, intimidating, threatening comments from cadets that were in leadership positions over me. My first-class cadet that was over me in my division actually told me that I was looking for somebody to blame on my way out because I was struggling academically, that I wanted to see the world burn. So yes, I did not receive anything specific. My investigation happened so quickly, and I decided to leave in the middle of my investigation, before it was completed. I have some documentation that I received from the Senate staffer that received part of my investigation and not me. Some of these letters were forwarded to me, and there is proof in there that as soon as I left, the administrative investigation did not conclude. Back to Senator Johnson, I do not even know if they have anything. I do not even know if the investigation ensued, so.

Senator HASSAN. Thank you. Those comments certainly reflect culture, right, along with the leadership's lack of action. Lieutenant.

Lieutenant MCCAFFERTY. Yes, Senator. Again, I never reported anything, because I knew at that point my career would be over before it had even started. I did absolutely get demerits during my 4 years. For example, I had a pet crab in my drawer with my roommate, because we were lonely and wanted a friend. We had to release him, unfortunately, when we were caught, so that was three demerits. I left my window open, two demerits. I did receive demerits, but I have never received demerits in retaliation for reporting anything, because I have never reported anything. What I will say is that I represented a third-class cadet when I was a second-class. She was a sophomore, I was a junior, and she approached me in confidence about extensive harassment by a group of young men. These young men called themselves The Gentlemen's Club. I spoke with her at length about the reality and what we should do and how we should approach this—and I said I am happy to support you. If we both go down, we both go down, but I will go down doing the right thing with you. We ended up coming forward, and all of those four individuals were brought to mast. Only one was required to leave. He was later allowed to reenlist in the Coast Guard in Michigan, my home State. This individual, who had a sexual misconduct charge, was forced out of the Academy, then got to reenlist into the Coast Guard and is currently serving.

The lesson becomes abundantly clear to all of us who do report—like if you do report, this is what is going to happen, so the majority of us frankly just do not, because we value our career. We want to do well. We want to help other people, and we do not want to jeopardize our own career, and our own safety, and our own mental health, because time and time again, this is exactly what happens.

Senator HASSAN. Yes. With your indulgence, Mr. Chair, I would like to hear from the Colonel, too.

Colonel FENNER. Thank you, ma'am. I am certainly in a whole different group, but just to indicate—no matter how much changes, nothing changes. Two quick incidences, because over 26 years, it happens a lot. But in the first case, as I was harassed as a faculty member at the Air Force Academy, the department led an administrative procedure. They put a letter of reprimand into the more senior officer than I's folder. That comes out when he transfers. They did transfer him away. They put him in charge of basic trainees at Lackland Air Force Base (LAFB), instead of getting him out of a chain where he could assault and harass people, and he did make O-6 and retire from the service.

In the second instance, I was on the faculty. Apparently, a number of young women felt comfortable coming to report to me that they had either been assaulted or harassed. I collected their stories. I happened to confide in another faculty mate. Somehow that got to the commandant. I was a junior captain. I was called into the commandant's office, outside my chain of command, and asked why they were coming to me, who was it, what they said, and I refused to give names or anything. Then they said, why do they not report to us? I said with all due respect to the two-star, this is why

they do not report to you, that if a captain, faculty member outside the chain of command gets called on the carpet.

Senator HASSAN. Right.

Colonel FENNER. It is way before what happened to them, and what is shocking is it is still happening.

Senator HASSAN. Yes. Again, I thank you all for being here and for your bravery and courage, and for your service. Thanks.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Senator Hassan. I think we have reached the conclusion for now, but I want to join in thanking my colleagues, and I am just left with amazement and determination that we will pursue this matter. Amazement at your courage and tenacity, and determination that we are going to make sure that we rely on whatever truth-telling tools we have to make sure that we illuminate and uncover whatever we can here. I mentioned these statistics before—an estimated 51 percent of cadet women have had an experience which met criteria for sexual harassment in just the past year—51 percent. 28.3 percent of female cadets said they have experienced unwanted sexual contact before—since entering the Academy. Only 15 percent who experienced unwanted sexual conduct in the last year reported it, and half of them have experienced retaliation.

This is not ancient history. This is a 2022 survey, last year. I respect that there is new leadership at the Academy. We all know who the new superintendent is and who the previous one was. We know who past commandants have been and who the present one is. We are going to explore these issues with past and present leadership, as well as others who may have information. Normally, we would leave the record open for 2 weeks; I am going to leave it open until February 1 so that others who have these kinds of stories can submit them, and we will make them part of this record. In other words, anybody who is hearing about this hearing and who wants to submit their stories, as a number have done already to us, they can do it anonymously. We will take it; we will make it part of the record. Senator Johnson.

Senator JOHNSON. Again, I just want to thank the witnesses, and I want to thank you. This is an important hearing, and I am truly dedicated to do everything we possibly can. It is going to take subpoenas; we are going to have to subpoena. These folks are not going to cooperate, so we are going to have to use every compulsory process we have to extract the truth out of these folks, but I am dedicated to doing it and I certainly want to join you in doing so. But again, thank you so much for your service, and thanks for your testimony.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:16 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

**Opening Statement of Chair Richard Blumenthal
"Coast Guard Academy Whistleblowers: Stories of Sexual Assault and Harassment"
U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
December 12, 2023**

This hearing on the Permanent Subcommittee of Investigations will come to order. Welcome everyone, thank you all for being here; my colleagues who are here, and most especially the witnesses who have joined us. This hearing is about a culture of cover-up. It is a culture of cover-up that the Coast Guard has spawned and sustained for decades. It has discouraged and deterred victims and survivors of sexual abuse at the Coast Guard Academy from coming forward. It has denied them justice, and it has failed to protect them from retaliation and reprisal when they have stood up and spoken out.

For years this culture enabled sexual misconduct to occur, despite evidence of widespread, unaddressed, and egregious violations of basic norms. And, we want to make sure that there is not only transparency but also accountability going forward. This culture has continued to refuse accountability, a type of accountability when it comes to naming names and holding wrongdoers accountable. It's the type of accountability that requires full cooperation with the Subcommittee's inquiry, which so far, the Coast Guard has failed to fully do.

As we will hear today it is a culture that has all too often victimized survivors twice, first when they are assaulted or harassed, and then later when the leaders in command have failed to hold the perpetrators fully accountable. And, it is a culture that has fostered fear, fear of coming forward, fear that lives would be destroyed. The fear that, all too often, has been proven right. This is not just about Fouled Anchor, it is about lost Anchor, it is about a Coast Guard that has lost its way in doing justice for women who are victims and survivors of sexual assault. It is about a Coast Guard that has abandoned its moral compass and lost its ethical sonar.

We are here because the Coast Guard has continued this problem, and we know that the culture can and must be fixed. This past summer, we learned that the Coast Guard failed to disclose to Congress a multi-year internal investigation into dozens of instances of sexual assault at the Academy that had been reported but not adequately investigated or otherwise addressed. That investigation, known as Fouled Anchor, looked at 102 instances of rape or sexual assault at the Coast Guard Academy from the early 1990's through 2006, ultimately identifying 43 alleged perpetrators with a total of 63 victims. And yet, that investigation, or so-called investigation, failed to even scratch the surface. The majority of our witnesses here today will talk about violations of their rights, sexual assault that occurred outside that timeframe. So, it was not covered by Operation Fouled Anchor. The investigation found that the Academy had previously been aware of allegations against 30 of those 43 alleged perpetrators, but that only five -- only five -- had been reported to law enforcement at the time.

The report from this investigation concluded that the Academy leadership who oversaw these cases did not "instill a culture intolerant of any form of sexual misconduct; they did not promote and maintain a climate conducive to reporting incidents of sexual assault; and they did not adequately investigate alleged offenses as serious criminal matters and hold perpetrators appropriately accountable."

This Subcommittee opened a bipartisan inquiry soon after Operation Fouled Anchor was disclosed. Our inquiry, which is ongoing, has already found that Operation Fouled Anchor failed to address sexual misconduct in a vast number of cases at the Coast Guard Academy. We have heard accounts from numerous individuals with disturbing personal stories; gripping, painful, stories of sexual assault and harassment at the Coast Guard Academy, and in the Coast Guard. Those survivors include both men and women, and they span nearly five decades of Coast Guard alumni and retirees. Four of these brave

individuals are here with us today. And on behalf of myself, and all of my colleagues, I want to thank each of you for being here. I want to thank each of you for your courage and tenacity in coming forward.

The stories that we are going to hear today show how the Coast Guard Academy fostered an environment where assaults and harassment not only persisted, but fueled the culture of cover-up where survivors who did come forward were not treated with the seriousness and respect that they deserve. I want to share part of one, just one, individual story from a former cadet who is not here today. Just one of numerous accounts that the Subcommittee received in recent weeks. And we are going to make some of them part of this record. This woman, who was a constituent, was assaulted twice in her first year at the Academy, but did not disclose these assaults to anyone for decades, including members of her family. And I am quoting, "The rumors that existed about other girls who reported assaults were awful, and they eventually left the service because they were not taken seriously, and in some cases blamed for their assault. I hid the assaults from everyone that I knew, including my family and closest friends." This is a woman who chose the Academy. A woman who was committed to public service and chose to serve her country. But, because of what she experienced she decided to forgo a lifelong career in the Coast Guard. And our nation is worse off for it.

The stories that we have heard from survivors, that we are going to hear in fact from our witnesses today, are echoed by the Coast Guard's own data, a 2022 survey. A survey of cadets revealed that nearly 30% of female cadets experienced unwanted sexual conduct and contact since arriving at the Academy. That means that for every four female cadets, one or more has experienced unwanted sexual contact. That same survey found that only 15% of female survivors reported their assaults, and half of those who did, they experienced retaliation. More than half of female cadets surveyed reported experiencing sexual harassment in the last year.

I am encouraged that the Coast Guard is signaling, that they are beginning to take this problem seriously. The Coast Guard recently released the results of a 90-day Accountability and Transparency Review ordered by the Commandant after Operation Fouled Anchor was disclosed. This review includes programmatic recommendations aimed at addressing the deeply rooted cultural issues within the Coast Guard, and we support these efforts. I believe them to be a positive first step. But let me be clear, there is no accountability in that report. There is no naming of names. There is no reason given for the three-and-a-half-year delay between completion of Operation Fouled Anchor and its disclosure to the Congress. That report was concealed, hidden, and withheld from the United States Congress. This 90-day review in no way provides accountability. The Coast Guard's "Accountability Task Force" did not in fact recommend any steps to hold accountable past perpetrators or generations of Coast Guard leaders who oversaw and enabled that culture of misconduct, to build up, that enabled the cover-up.

Accountability is essential to ensure justice for victims and survivors, and prevent it from occurring in the future. There is no deterrence without accountability. Perpetrators must know that their actions will be punished, and that the survivors and victims will be protected.

The Coast Guard also has to do more to fully cooperate with this Subcommittee's investigation and produce documents that we requested in order to reveal the full scope of the culture of cover-up that has existed on their watch. While we are encouraged that the Coast Guard has produced some records, we have yet to receive a single internal email related to the decision of whether or not to disclose the report on Operation Fouled Anchor. Not one internal email disclosed so far. These critical documents must be provided without further delay.

And let me just say, finally, while this hearing is primarily focused on the Coast Guard and specifically the Academy, we know that these issues are not limited to the Coast Guard or to the Coast Guard Academy. The culture of cover-up has inevitably bled from the ranks of the Academy to the Coast Guard

itself. These problems persist in other military services, and we need to be determined to rid all of our military of sexual assault and harassment.

The Coast Guard has a long and storied history of service to our nation. It is vital to domestic safety and national defense. I have been a strong supporter of the Coast Guard, a strong supporter of the Academy, a strong supporter of a museum that will tell the story of the Coast Guard. But, the strongest supporters of the Coast Guard ought to be the most determined to rid it of this scorching scourge. And I hope that this hearing and the others that will follow it in our investigation will help in that effort.

And with that I will turn to the Ranking Member for his opening remarks.

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Ron Johnson
“Coast Guard Academy Whistleblowers: Stories of Sexual Assault and Harassment”
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
December 12, 2023

Over the last two months, the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (the Subcommittee) conducted a bipartisan review of sexual assaults and harassment at the Coast Guard Academy. The Subcommittee spoke with, and reviewed accounts from, individuals—both current and former cadets—who shared first-hand accounts of the sexual violence and mistreatment they faced during their time at the academy. Most of these stories had very unfortunate similarities—Coast Guard Academy officials failed to provide these victims the support they needed following their assault and did little to hold alleged perpetrators accountable.

These stories corroborate press reports from earlier this year that documented persistent leadership problems at the Coast Guard Academy regarding its handling of alleged sexual assaults. Beginning in June 2023, CNN published a series of articles featuring instances of sexual assault and sexual harassment that occurred at the academy with hardly any sufficient action taken by academy officials.

Most notably, CNN revealed that in 2014 the Coast Guard initiated its own investigation into alleged sexual abuse at the school. That investigation, called Operation Fouled Anchor, uncovered more than 100 potential assaults occurring between 1990 and 2006. CNN reported that Operation Fouled Anchor, “identified more than 60 substantiated incidents of rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment committed by academy cadets.”¹ CNN also noted that the investigation “found that school leaders routinely failed to report serious allegations to law enforcement, intentionally avoiding the criminal justice system.”² When school officials recommended pursuing criminal inquiries into alleged assaults, leadership at the academy apparently stopped those efforts.

The findings of Operation Fouled Anchor were so damning that, after the final report was completed in 2020, Coast Guard officials apparently kept it hidden from the public for three years. Prompted by inquiries from CNN about the investigation, in late June 2023 the Coast Guard finally briefed the Senate Commerce Committee on Operation Fouled Anchor, just days before CNN publicly revealed its existence and subsequent cover-up.

The Coast Guard must be held accountable for any action officials may have taken that led to the cover-up of the findings of Operation Fouled Anchor. Further, to the extent that Coast Guard Academy leadership mishandled or downplayed allegations of sexual assault at the school, that failure cannot be allowed to go unpunished. Finally, academy cadets and all

¹ Blake Ellis et al., *Criminal investigation into Coast Guard Academy revealed years of sexual assault cover-ups, but findings were kept secret*, CNN, June 30, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/30/politics/coast-guard-academy-secret-sexual-assault-investigation-invs/index.html>.

² *Id.*

members of the Coast Guard deserve to feel safe among their fellow service members. No one should ever be in an environment that does not take sexual violence or harassment seriously.

I hope Coast Guard officials will listen to today's hearing, learn from the academy's failures, and make immediate and necessary changes to restore its credibility among past, current, and prospective service members. I thank the witnesses for coming forward today.

Written Testimony of Jennifer L. Yount
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
December 12, 2023

Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing. My name is Jennifer L. Yount. I graduated from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in 1981 where I was a member of the second class of women admitted to the Academy. As a cadet, I fell in love with the Coast Guard and its mission. To this day, I cherish and appreciate the training, education, and lifetime of opportunities the Academy provided me. Unfortunately, I also faced sexual assault and sexual harassment during my time there. Nevertheless, I persevered. Upon graduation, I was commissioned as an Ensign and began my career. I loved my time afloat and loved completing Coast Guard missions. After 20 years, I retired as the Commanding Officer of a cutter, the first woman to command a vessel of this classification and only the second woman to command a U.S. combatant. I then became the California Maritime Academy's Director of Leadership Development and an executive and leadership consultant. Forty-six years after my first day at the Academy, I remain an active and proud member of the Coast Guard community.

I bleed Coast Guard blue. I deeply admire and respect Coast Guard women and men who sacrifice tirelessly day in and day out to protect our country, our people, and our natural resources. I also love the Academy. My testimony is motivated by my love for the Coast Guard and the people who have served it in the past and who serve it today. I am not here today to try to tear down the Coast Guard, but rather to help make it better. But my testimony is also motivated by my anger and frustration. When I first heard about Operation Fouled Anchor in June 2023, I felt powerless; my pain and anger soon began to boil over. I first heard the Coast Guard make promises that they would address sexual assault and harassment in 1979, when they said, "we will take care of it." Over 40 years later, those promises remain unfulfilled by Coast Guard leadership. No one has acted to "take care" of the systemic problem of sexual violence in the Coast Guard and its Academy. It is beyond time to do so.

My deep frustration is also fueled by the Coast Guard's insistence, particularly since the Operation Fouled Anchor scandal, that we focus only on the future, effectively diminishing the significant physical and emotional harms suffered by Coast Guard women over the past 40-50 years. Since the beginning of the #MeToo Movement in 2017, I have pushed for the recognition of "the Lost Girls," those alumnae who have never been recognized for the sexual and physical trauma they endured while at the Coast Guard Academy. More recently, in the aftermath of Operation Fouled Anchor, I joined a team of veteran Coast Guard survivors and allies to rally together to create an independent action team—*Coasties Thriving Together*. We feel lied to and lack trust in the Coast Guard after so many years of false assures that they will get it right this time. Our voices as survivors must finally be heard and acknowledged.

It is important to emphasize that this issue goes beyond the Academy and is also a Coast Guard-wide problem for officers and enlisted service members alike. Two of my three most significant incidents occurred while I was on active duty. I also must state that this is more than just a Coast Guard problem. This is a military services problem. Advocacy groups also exist at

my sister services and some of their representatives will be in attendance at the hearing. In 2021, Naval Academy women formed a survivor advocacy network to support healing and advocacy for sexual assault survivors. The group is primarily composed of graduates but has added members from other military service academies. The group organizes full-day virtual survivor retreats and hosts shorter webinars where women survivors can learn about ways to heal from their traumas and feel part of a supportive community.¹

For years, I have been told that my stories were “ancient history” and not worth discussing. But I am here today because I think my story will help explain that this problem of sexual assault and harassment at the Coast Guard Academy and in the service has existed since the beginning. My hope is to witness a day when women (and men) have the power to stand up and say, “You can’t do this to me” and when men (and women) say, “You can’t do this to my colleague and friend.” To move forward as a great nation, everyone – men and women – must similarly define and value respect, acceptance, and equality. I hope that testimony will help us get one step closer to that day.

I. My Experiences

a. Journey to the Coast Guard Academy

I was born in Baltimore, Maryland and raised in Manassas, Virginia. I first became interested in the Coast Guard Academy during my college search for a Marine Biology major. Like many young people of my generation, I was mesmerized by the Jacques Cousteau television series; so much so, I was prepared to dedicate my life to the study of the sea.

Both of my parents were young adults during the World War II era, and my father served in the Pacific theater. Service to my country seemed second nature as so many uncles and cousins had served before me. I had no hesitation or second thoughts about military service. Additionally, since I was raised to believe in myself and my capabilities, I admittedly did not question my decision to enter the Academy and become known as a legacy woman graduate.

I entered the Coast Guard Academy in 1977, the second year women were admitted. There were 42 women in my class of approximately 360, far more than in the first year. Within four years, however, our ranks would dwindle to twelve and we would become the second smallest graduating class of women ever at the Academy.

In my stories of the Academy, much can be said about my cadre, the Class of 1979. Cadre are Second Class cadets, or juniors, who during the summer are responsible for the training and integration of the newly arrived class into the Corps of Cadets. They wake you up, they tell you what to wear, where to be, and what to do nearly 16 hours a day for eight very long weeks. Today, I consider many of them friends and colleagues. However, my cadre, the Class of 1979, proudly

¹ I respectfully request that the two letters written by former MARAD Chief Counsel and former Coast Guard officer K. Denise Rucker Krepp found in Enclosure (4) regarding sexual harassment and sexual assault in the Coast Guard be included in the hearing record. I also ask that the *Maritime Executive*, *Military Times*, and CNN articles written by Ms. Krepp found in same Enclosure also be included in the record.

wore the moniker of the “Last Class with Balls,” as they would be the final all-male graduating class at the Academy. I truly believe the primary objective of some of these men was not my training or development as a future Coast Guard officer, but rather the elimination of women from the Corps. To make matters worse, I frequently heard the staff and administration comment when women were harassed or mistreated, “well, boys will be boys.” Meanwhile, alcohol consumption at the Academy was extremely high, even though by regulation we were a “dry” campus. I remember the pride reverberating throughout the Corps when in my Swab (freshmen) year, the Academy was named one of the top 10 alcohol-consuming campuses per student in *Playboy* magazine.

b. Incident #1 - 1978 at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy

Through the years, what happened to me at the Academy in 1978 has haunted me and, at times, caused me immense pain and sorrow. Even as I am writing this, I feel fear. I have shared my story with very few people. Even to this day, I am unable to verbalize why I was unable to speak out then. Today, I recognize this is a common reaction. However, in 1978, as an 18-year-old, I had no idea why I held the truth to myself. I know the fear of being further ostracized was always in the forefront of my mind. I also know I wanted to be accepted as a cadet and later, an officer, and not as a *female* cadet or *female* officer. All I ever wanted was to be an accomplished Coast Guard officer and leader. For many women like me, the great mystery is how we could be so strong in every aspect of our lives and yet so weak in these terrible moments.

At the time, cadet regulations required our doors always to be open except when changing clothes or sleeping. Additionally, our doors could never be locked. These policies, a sexist campus culture, and alcohol created a perfect storm for sexual misconduct. During my first year, there were rumors of many women being physically assaulted and emotionally harassed. The emotional harassment was extreme for many of us, and the fear of sexual assault or rape prompted several of my classmates to leave the Academy. Although there was a persistent overlay of fear regarding sexual violence, it was never discussed, even among the women cadets. In those days, we focused on two things—blending in and surviving.

Despite this environment and despite the fear, I remained at the Academy. I felt a tremendous desire to serve my country. I also loved the camaraderie I experienced. I was a part of one of the greatest teams in the country—the cadets of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. I endured harassment, assault, and discrimination because I chose to focus on the greater good of serving my country.

My first advocates, friends, and many times, saviors, were Tony and Linda Stimatz. As a Swab, I was fortunate enough to be assigned to Tony Stimatz’s Calculus I class and he would be my Mathematics instructor for four additional semesters. Tony was the first officer I witnessed who openly supported women cadets at the Academy. Tony’s wife Linda was an extremely passionate and caring woman. For my four years at the Academy, they provided me with love, safety, and refuge. They were the first to reach out and ask the question: had I been sexually harassed or assaulted at the Academy? I told them that I had. They became the first people I ever talked to about Billet Night for the Class of 1978.

Billet Night was a tradition during the spring semester at the Academy, the evening when every member of the graduating class was provided with their assignment for the next two years. Not only did it represent a graduate's assignment, it more importantly signified the end of an arduous four-year effort to graduate and become a commissioned officer. That evening, one of my cadres from the Class of 1979 came into my room and told my roommate and me of the raucous atmosphere and excessive alcohol intake by the graduating cadets. He also told us that we should be sure to lock our door when we went to bed and not open it until morning, regardless of what we heard. And so, on that night, my roommate and I locked our door, openly breaking a cadet regulation.

As midnight approached, very loud and boisterous male voices came from the corridors of our dormitory. There was a knock on the door and a voice asking to come in. We did not reply. There was another knock and a third knock and a second voice. Initially, they seemed polite, but we did not respond. As the minutes passed, the knocks became louder and more frequent, changing from polite raps to pounding and yelling. Not only did we not respond, no one else in the dormitory did either. The second class cadet's previous warning was coming true. Someone was coming and I knew they would try to hurt me. I remember the panic and fear I felt as they pounded on the door. I remember freezing, unable to move or speak. The pounding and yelling persisted until there was a loud crashing noise. The door broke open, and two first class cadets came rushing in. Within seconds one of the men was on top of me and the other on top of my roommate. I did not move, I was frozen. I have been asked time and time again for specifics about this incident – what exactly happened, how did I feel during or after, what was said during or after, what did my roommate and I do or say after, and more. Honestly, it is an absolute black hole. I just know that at a time when I was physically the strongest I had ever been in my life, I did nothing. At some point, and for whatever reason, the cadet on top of me got up. I am not sure why—maybe he had a moment of sense and reason. He then pulled his classmate off my roommate and they both left, closing the broken door behind them. I was left feeling dark and hollow.

The next morning, my roommate and I awoke, didn't talk about the attack, and went about our daily routines. The next Saturday, in our weekly room inspection, the Inspection Officer, a woman Lieutenant Junior Grade, inspected our room and noted the damage to our door. Without question or comment as to how the door had been damaged, she awarded both of us demerits for destruction to government property. Thus ended any acknowledgement or discussion of the event for over a year.

In August 1979, my class trained the entering Swabs in the Class of 1983. For the summer, I was assigned with others to a training unit cycling through two-week training events. One evening, after dinner as I entered the room for a mandatory training session, there stood Linda Stimatz with another woman. As we took our seats, they began a discussion on sexual assault at the Academy. As the discussion continued, the murmurs of "Why are we here?", "That shit doesn't happen here", and more were heard throughout the room. All the while, I slid lower and lower in my chair; I wanted to be out of that room. I realized the conversation had stopped and Linda was staring at me. Eventually, her eyes drew me out of my chair and to the front of the room, the last place on earth I ever wanted to be.

Although I prefer to celebrate the courage of others, I must say in that moment I was a courageous 19-year-old woman. As I moved to the front of the room, I felt compelled to be truthful about my experience. Negative consequences of being shunned by my classmates or worse never crossed my mind. So, I began telling my classmates my story. I ended by saying it is not a unique story. I added there are other women in our class who have been assaulted and raped, and then I stood there. My great friend, Charlie Ray, then stood up and said: "You're our sisters and we can give you shit, but no one will ever hurt you again."

Obviously, there were consequences to my comments requiring me to spend time with the Administration. Why did I not say something earlier? Who were the cadets? And many, many more questions. For about two hours I answered questions and at no time, in all these discussions, did I reveal the names of those two cadets. It was not then nor is it now my purpose. Within a couple of weeks, the dust settled and several changes to cadet regulations were made to increase safety for women cadets and cadets in general, including the ability to lock our doors at night and while dressing.

To be sure, what happened to me at the Coast Guard Academy haunted me for years to come. After my graduation, I was required to stay in the same dormitory, Chase Hall, while conducting training on personnel policies at the Academy and for leadership classes. I would regularly experience sensations of absolute and debilitating fear if I heard noises while showering or using the bathroom. Similarly, I would curl into a fetal position in my room when I heard noises in the passageway. Although none of these sensations were present when I was a cadet, they became more pronounced as I became more aware of my emotions. I found these reactions so disturbing and disruptive to my experience that I requested not to be assigned to berthing in Chase Hall again.

c. Incident #2 - 1983 Onboard U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Dallas*

I wish I could say my story of harassment ended there. However, it did not. Upon my graduation in May 1981, I was assigned to the Cutter *Dallas* homeported in Governors Island, New York. When I reported aboard, I was the first woman ever to sail on *Dallas* and my eventual roommate would not report onboard for several months. I was greeted with warmth and professionalism and provided every opportunity to be the most successful junior officer possible. Between the Captain, Operations Officer, and Engineer Officer, I was shown nothing but the ultimate respect and professionalism. All of them were the most fabulous officers, mentors, and teachers. They contributed greatly to my professional learning and development and most importantly, created an atmosphere for me to fall in love with life at sea.

As I was preparing to complete my second year in *Dallas* and to transfer to a new duty station, I requested permission to extend one year onboard with the strong endorsement from my second Captain. It was agreed, and I began a third year, serving as the Navigator and Assistant Operations Officer. After two years sharing a room, I was assigned to a single stateroom. A private stateroom with additional space and privacy was a dream come true for any junior officer. This particular patrol would be classified as the "busiest patrol in CG history" by CG Atlantic Area Operations and I was soon designated as the Acting Operations Officer or third in command. Most of my days began before sunrise and always ended well after sunset. I was energized and excited

to be provided with such a tremendous growth opportunity and experience. Professionally, this was becoming a significant operational foundation in my career. Personally, it eventually became a nightmare.

At first, the harassment began with phone calls to my stateroom late at night with no words spoken. Next, I began receiving calls with heavy breathing. Even though I believed I was a well-liked member of the crew and close to the wardroom (the dining room for officers), I felt isolated and alone. I began to be afraid, especially when the ship was dark. Feelings of isolation and fear are highlighted and intensified when you are out on the open sea. Ships at night are dark places not just on the exterior, but also in the passageways. After every call, I became more conscious as I walked about the ship after dark. After over two years in *Dallas*, I began to watch my step and listen for every noise; I was on edge. I also began receiving menacing phone calls saying "It's your fault" and "Go away." I had no idea what any of this meant. On the final evening of this harassment, I was on the bridge until after midnight and then came below to my stateroom. I was exhausted. When I entered my room, I saw that my pillow had been repeatedly slashed open by a knife.

I was petrified. I found two service members I trusted who were close by, and I told them what had happened. I then reported this incident to the Captain. He assured me I was safe, and this behavior would not continue on his ship. I can still feel his emotion and passion for the ship, his crew, and his sense of right and wrong. I never doubted his words.

When I returned to my stateroom, my pillow and its stuffing had been cleaned up, my phone disconnected, and word was given to send a messenger if I was needed. As fate would have it, I had to leave the vessel for a short assignment. When I returned to *Dallas* nearly a week later, the Captain told me my incident was over and I would be a respected and cherished member of the crew from that point forward. I later found out the reason for the harassment was because the cutter's new Executive Officer (XO) had been approached by several crewmembers complaining about the pornographic films being shown in the berthing areas. The cat calls and other sounds were disturbing them. The XO's response was to prohibit the showing of these films, but he blamed it on the fact that women (I was the only one) were onboard. After a speedy investigation, the Captain held a disciplinary hearing on the flight deck with the crew in full formation. When the hearing was complete, there was no doubt about the Captain's position on sexual harassment and its place on his ship.

I would go on to sail on four other ships in my Coast Guard and Merchant Marine career. Dark passages remained an Achilles heel for me. Both Coast Guard and Merchant vessels turn the lights off inside the ships at night to maintain the night vision of their watch standers. Because of my fear, I carried, day and night, a small mag light with me in a sheath connected to my belt. Most thought I was *Semper Paratus, i.e., Always Ready*. In reality, I was just afraid of the dark and what could be lurking around the next passageway.

d. Incident #3 - 1989 Onboard U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Steadfast*

Unfortunately, *Dallas* was not the final episode of sexual harassment or discrimination in my life in the U.S. Coast Guard. The third major episode occurred when I was the Operations

Officer, third in command, on the 210-foot cutter *Steadfast*. *Steadfast* was my second dream assignment. My orders for *Steadfast* arrived before those of the new Executive Officer (XO), who would be second in command.

Upon seeing the XO's orders, and recognizing the name, a friend contacted me and told me this could be "trouble" but hoped he was wrong. I began to understand why shortly after this XO reported onboard. I quickly realized his need to exercise a dominant style over me particularly. Because of the relationship the Captain and I already had, and the Captain's trust and reliance on me, I reported directly to him on all operational matters. The XO did not like this and made it very clear to both of us. Although the Captain did not care, the XO began to micro-manage every other aspect of my performance and make my job as difficult as possible. Making it worse, he also effected a change to operations to have me report to him, rather than to the Captain. Tasks or decisions that took minutes previously, now took several hours as they flowed through the XO, allowing even more opportunities for his baseless and sexist verbal berating regarding my abilities and skills.

Then started the inappropriate jokes about women, likely for my benefit. The XO made sure not to make these jokes while in the presence of the Captain, but had no trouble in my presence, even though it made me obviously uncomfortable. Additionally, hardly a meal in the wardroom went by without him making a joke about his beautiful blonde girlfriend and disparaging her about something stupid she had done.

While underway on deployment and moored at the Coast Guard Base in San Juan, Puerto Rico I met with Tony Stimatz, my trusted friend and advisor, and broke down crying telling him my story. I had had enough. Within several hours, he was driving me to the Naval Hospital in Roosevelt Roads for an evaluation for increasing depression over the past six months. The report from that October 1988 appointment read: "She complains of a decrease in appetite with a five to six pounds loss of weight during the past week, difficulty in falling asleep, increase tearfulness, decreased energy level, difficulty in concentration, loss of self-esteem, and self-confidence." The report also noted that I had been berated and belittled by my Executive Officer.

I would remain at the Naval Hospital for four days before being transferred back to my homeport in St. Petersburg, Florida and for follow-up care at MacDill Air Force Base. On my second visit to MacDill, I met my new doctor who was a woman. Because of her gender, I thought that I would finally have a doctor who would listen to me. I was wrong. The military was not yet prepared to respond to this type of harassment, and she focused my treatment on "improving my coping skills." This diagnosis led to a Coast Guard Medical Board review to determine whether I should be dismissed from service. Although I was cleared by the Medical Board in February 1989, this evaluation remained on my record. It took me two years and countless hours of advocacy to finally expunge this record so that I could be promoted to Lieutenant Commander in 1991.

With the Medical Board behind me and new orders to Washington, D.C., I thought my career was moving in a positive direction again. However, shortly after arriving in D.C., I received my Officer Evaluation Report from *Steadfast*. The receipt of this evaluation led to several years of administrative paperwork and effort to have my personnel record cleared of statements I considered gender-biased and discriminatory. Of gravest concern was the reports reference to my

removal from the vessel due medical reasons, which is prohibited. The filing of and approval of my claim was the first successful Board for the Correction of Military Records (BCMR) in the Coast Guard for gender discrimination.

Having been selected for Lieutenant Commander, and having prevailed on my claim of gender discrimination, I was looking forward to going back to sea as an Executive Officer (XO). I was told that of every Commanding Officer with a vacant XO position in the coming transfer season, only one would take me “because of my reputation.” Thus, in February 1992, I received my orders to cutter *Vigorous*.

Vigorous would be my breakthrough assignment re-establishing me as an exceptional officer afloat. Of the 23 performance criteria on my first XO evaluation, I received nine 7s (7 being the highest possible proficiency score); thirteen 6s; and one 5. When I shared this report with a mentor of mine, who was later to become the 25th Vice Commandant of the Coast Guard, she made two comments. First, she said laughing, “if I saw this in a promotion board, I would throw it out, because it was just too good.” Then she said: “You don’t need a ship, you already walk on water.”

Eventually, I decided to retire from the Coast Guard in 2001. I received a license of Master of Steam or Motor Vessels of Any Gross Tons upon Oceans from the U.S. Merchant Marine. I spent three years as an Assistant Professor in the Marine Transportation Department and then spent five years as the Director of Leadership Development at The California Maritime Academy, a campus of California State University. I subsequently retired from the Maritime Academy in 2009, and went on to become an Executive and Leadership Coach and Leadership Trainer and Consultant.

As you can tell, I am extremely proud of my Coast Guard career. However, I cannot help but feel dismayed that today’s servicemembers and today’s cadets are still fighting against similar types of sexual assault and harassment that my peers and I faced back in the late 1970s and 1980s. This treatment was not acceptable when I was active in the Coast Guard, and I am at a loss that it is still happening today. Coast Guard service members and our country deserve so much better.

II. Actions

Sexual assault and trauma at the Academy is a systemic problem, and it must be acknowledged as such. Such an acknowledgement highlights that this is a deeply embedded cultural problem at the Coast Guard, not just a lack of policies or training. However, policy changes must also occur, including dormitory management, a zero tolerance alcohol policy, a re-evaluation of the Board of Directors and a revitalized Board of Visitors, and modernization of its personnel records management system. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there must be accountability for all those past and present who have failed the Academy, its cadets, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

a. Acknowledgement that Harassment and Assault is a Systemic Problem

The Coast Guard must acknowledge that military sexual assault and trauma is a systemic problem at the Academy and in the service and must be addressed in a comprehensive and effective

way. That acknowledgment should begin by an apology from the Commandant, with words to the effect of: “I’m sorry on behalf of the Coast Guard for the pain and suffering caused an untold number of women and men subjected to military sexual assault and trauma.”

Although the Commandant has apologized in the past, her addresses feel scripted by attorneys and lack any empathy to the survivors for the years of pain and suffering we have felt. I had hoped as an Alumna, mother of an Alumna, and now Commandant, she could or would have stepped forward as a courageous leader and acknowledged this for all the women and men who are classmates, colleagues, and friends. Until the Coast Guard acknowledges the breadth and seriousness of what has happened, we cannot move forward in taking the steps necessary to effect meaningful change.

I believe the Coast Guard memorandum dated November 27, 2023, “Commandant’s Directed Actions – Accountability and Transparency” is an absolute denial and refusal to openly acknowledge that systemic sexual assault and harassment has occurred at the Academy for the past 47 years, since 1976 when women entered as the Class of 1980. By only looking forward, the Commandant has discounted and contributed to the pain and scarring felt through the years by so many, including her own classmates and shipmates.

b. Culture Change

For harassment, assault, and discrimination to exist for over 45 years, a sense that such behavior is tolerated must be embedded in the culture of Academy and the Corps of Cadets, in particular. The culture of any organization comes from the top. Cadets and service members look to their leaders to set the rules and tone in any particular setting. Leadership at the Academy and in the Coast Guard – at all levels – must articulate and demonstrate on a daily basis a zero tolerance for sexual harassment and assault, and an intention to enforce strict accountability. If the leaders do not do this, or look the other way as sexual harassment and assault continues as before, they must be removed.

I would suggest that one way the Coast Guard can effect positive change is through its dormitory management policies. In December 2020, during a focus group, a senior African American retired officer stated, “the Beast lives in Chase Hall.” On most evenings, the Coast Guard Academy dormitory Chase Hall has only one adult on duty. The remainder of the Corps of Cadets oversight is conducted by the upper-class cadets (20 to 22 year olds) who wield considerable power and control over those within their command. I recommend the inclusion of live-in positions, similar to resident directors at universities, throughout Chase Hall, to provide evening and weekend oversight and guidance to student leaders. “The Beast” must be exorcised before a change to culture can exist.

I also recommend a zero-tolerance policy on underage drinking, and/or drinking on campus, including implementing a breathalyzer analysis of all cadets upon returning from liberty. This would require underage cadets to register zero and cadets 21 and older to register 0.08 and below, aligned with the legal limit in Connecticut. Although alcohol abuse has been slowly reduced throughout the years, it continues to be an obstacle for the Coast Guard to overcome, and a primary driver of sexual violence. As the 2022 Department of Defense Office of People

Analytics (OPA) Service Academy Gender Relations Survey showed, nearly 60% of all unwanted sexual contact incidents involved the use of alcohol.

Additionally, I recommend a re-evaluation of the personnel structure of the Academy's Board of Trustees. Of the 19 Board members, 10 are Academy graduates and 14 are either current or former Coast Guard employees, to the best of my knowledge. Therefore, the lack of diverse thinking and opinion brought forth in devising a strategic plan or any thought for that matter is questionable at best. Similarly, I recommend this Committee ensure a revitalized Board of Visitors at the Academy, since they are the only service academy without an active Board which is a responsibility falling squarely on Congress.

c. Veteran's Disability Benefits / Records Management

I further recommend this Committee ensure that funding is dedicated by the Coast Guard to modernize its personnel records systems as referenced in Enclosure (3). Veteran disability compensation for a service-related condition resulting from sexual assault or harassment while in the military must be approved by the Veterans Benefits Agency, which requires submission of a full personnel file. For Coast Guard veterans, this takes years because, unlike the Department of Defense, whose files are digitized and rapidly transmitted, the Coast Guard has a two-year backlog to produce files and no indication that victims of sexual violence have "head of the line" privileges.

d. Accountability

No change will result at the Academy, or in the service, if there is not full accountability—something that has been obviously lacking to date. Without such accountability, trust cannot be rebuilt within the workforce moving forward. As proven, years of studies and metrics have required change and change has never occurred. At a minimum, I recommend every individual associated with the Fouled Anchor cover-up be questioned under oath by Congress as to their understanding and role of the investigation and appropriate actions to taken based on that testimony.

Additionally, I request all former senior leaders associated with the Academy and the Operation Fouled Anchor investigation, including the Superintendents and Commandant of Cadets, should not be allowed to hold a leadership position at the Academy and have a voice in the Academy's future until their tenure has been fully vetted by this Committee to ensure no wrongdoing on their part with regard to their handling of matters related to military sexual assault and trauma.

Finally, leadership throughout the chain of command must ensure that in instances of sexual violence and harassment, "the penalty fits the crime." Too many times, I've heard a commanding officer comment on an individual's job performance, rather than their actions or character, when assessing their misconduct. As a service, we must honor our Core Values and halt this pattern of injustice and inequality regardless of whether a perpetrator is a "hard worker."

III. Final Thoughts

To conclude, I include two pictures, the first as a Swab when I was 17 years old and the second, my graduation picture when I was 21 years old. I look far different today as a 64-year-old woman. Still, I hope that the readers of this testimony remember that my first incident happened when I was just an 18-year-old girl.



(Left)
My Swab Portrait
(1977)

(Right)
My Graduation
Portrait (1981)

My family and I have always been extremely close. I shared everything with my parents. My brother was my best friend. However, my assault at the Academy was something I could not share even with them. I finally shared this with my brother this recent Thanksgiving holiday as I was preparing for this testimony. I told him, "I am glad Momma and Daddy are no longer living so I don't have to tell them too."

Even though my assault happened 46 years ago, I am still impacted by these memories. A few years ago, I conducted a consulting project with the Academy's Alumni Association. I asked the Association President if she could arrange for me to visit the room I was assaulted in and accompany me there during my next visit. My former cadet room is now part of the Office Candidate School and has been transformed into an office. There were no racks (beds), but the built-in closets and bookcases were the same. I opened a closet, closed my eyes, smelled old cadet smells, and was hit by nearly 40 years of emotions. I began to sob uncontrollably. Just a room and its smell can bring forward 40-year-old emotions.

I hope that my testimony today will help compel the Coast Guard Academy and the Coast Guard to acknowledge the harm that has been inflicted on its cadets and servicemembers, so that it can undergo a true cultural change to rid sexual assault and harassment from its ranks, and finally hold accountable those who failed to protect us.

A cultural transformation of the Academy and Coast Guard must occur so that surviving is no longer the norm and thriving is.

- Encl: (1) List of Coast Guard Assignments for Jennifer L. Yount, CDR, USCG (Ret.)
(2) Coasties Thriving Together
(3) Helping Survivors of Military Sexual Trauma Access Veterans Administration Care, Joanne McCaffrey Albero, CAPT, USCG (Ret.)
(4) Materials written by former MARAD Chief Counsel and former Coast Guard officer K. Denise Rucker Krepp

List of Coast Guard Assignments for Jennifer L. Yount, CDR, USCG (Ret)

- 1977 – 1981 U.S. Coast Guard Academy, New London, Connecticut
Graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Marine Science
- 1981 – 1984 USCGC *Dallas*, Governors Island, New York
Assigned as a Deck Watch Officer and Navigator
- 1984 – 1987 Seventh District Operations Center, Miami, Florida
Assigned as a Law Enforcement and Search and Rescue Operations Officer
Simultaneously obtained my Masters in Business Administration from Barry University in Miami Gardens, Florida while attending night school
- 1987 – 1989 USCGC *Steadfast*, St. Petersburg, Florida
Assigned as Operations Officer (Third in Command)
- 1989 – 1991 U.S. Coast Guard Command Center, Washington, DC
Assigned as a Coast Guard Operations Duty Officer
- 1991 – 1993 Enlisted Personnel Assignment Branch, Coast Guard Personnel, CG Headquarters, Washington, DC
Assigned as a Central Assignment Officer and Women's Afloat Assignment Officer
- 1993 – 1995 USCGC *Vigorous*, Cape May, New Jersey
Assigned as Executive Officer (Second in Command)
- 1995 – 1997 Military Personnel Policy Branch, Coast Guard Personnel, CG Headquarters, Washington, DC
Assigned to review and revise existing policies and develop new policies for military personnel
- 1997 – 1999 Chief, Cutter Management, Pacific Area, Alameda, California
Assigned to the oversight of the Coast Guard Pacific Area cutter fleet
- 1999 – 2001 USCGC *Dauntless*, Galveston, Texas
Assigned as Commanding Officer (First in Command)
- September 30, 2001 Retired from Active Duty

Enclosure (1)



Our Purpose

Coasties Thriving Together is an independent action team comprised of volunteer Coast Guard veterans serving survivors of military sexual and physical trauma. We provide a platform for information sharing and resource availability, third-party external recommendations, and a community of compassionate allies dedicated to thriving, not just surviving.

Our Core Values

Honor: Integrity is our standard. We demonstrate uncompromising ethical conduct and moral behavior in all our personal and organizational actions. We are loyal and accountable to the trust of those we serve.

Respect: We value our diverse colleagues who have experienced a range of traumatic events. We treat each other and those we serve with dignity, respect, and compassion and without judgement. We consider all communications as confidential within the bounds of the law, and through positive, constructive discussions without the call-out culture. We work as a team.

Devotion to Thriving: We are volunteers who want Coast Guard veterans to flourish. We exist to continue to serve, connect survivors with support, call for accountability, and provide education where policy or legal limitations and constraints lie. We serve with pride.

Our Vision

We stand Always Ready to shape policy, identify gaps in governance and resources, call for accountability, and recommend innovative and inclusive solutions to help our own thrive after experiencing trauma.

Why Now?

The Independent Action Team questions the trustworthiness and credibility of the Coast Guard, and Coast Guard Academy in fully caring for survivors of military sexual and physical trauma. As survivors, friends of survivors, and leaders, we know this is not just an Academy problem, but a Coast Guard problem. We also know that at the Academy and in the Coast Guard military sexual assault and harassment still exists despite efforts to reduce or eliminate it from its ranks.

Enclosure (2)

The environment of hazing, bullying, and harassment went unchanged for decades leaving many survivors in its wake without acknowledgement or trauma treatment.

Although locating recent data specific to military sexual and physical trauma in the Coast Guard is sparse, the 2021 *Improving the Representation of Women and Racial/Ethnic Minorities Among U.S. Coast Guard Active-Duty Members*, commonly known as the *RAND Study*, does shed some light on this as a Coast Guard problem. According to the *Study*, “thirty percent of female enlisted personnel (compared with 4 percent of male enlisted) and 20 percent of female officers (compared with 3 percent of male officers) indicated that experiences involving sexual harassment or sexual assault were retention considerations.²” Additionally, “47 percent of female enlisted personnel (compared with 5 percent of male enlisted) and 54 percent of female officers (compared with 6 percent of male officers) indicated that they are sometimes unfairly singled out because of their gender.³”

As women and men with no positions and no authority we intend to have a voice, say “No more,” and ensure substantial actions are taken. We also intend to provide a virtual safe haven for all to congregate, share, and receive the support needed to not just survive, but to thrive.

Background

In June of 2023, CNN exposed a secret investigation into alleged sexual abuse at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy uncovering a history of rapes, assaults and other serious misconduct being ignored and, at times, covered up by high-ranking officials. The probe’s findings, “Operation Fouled Anchor,” completed in July 2019 had been kept confidential by Coast Guard senior leadership. Operation Fouled Anchor focused on reports of sexual assault at the Academy between 1992 to 2006.

Operation Fouled Anchor, named after a ship’s anchor entangled around itself, was launched in 2014 when an academy graduate claimed her allegations of rape from years earlier had never been investigated. While looking into the woman’s case, agents determined her allegations and more than two dozen other reports of misconduct had essentially been buried by academy leaders. And as they continued digging, they unearthed more than 90 potential assaults from the late 1980s to 2006. “There was a disturbing pattern of not treating reported sexual assaults as criminal matters,” the Coast Guard’s draft report reviewed by CNN stated. In some instances, school officials at the time recommended launching criminal inquiries into

² Rand Corporation. (2021) *Improving the Representation of Women and Racial/Ethnic Minorities Among U.S. Coast Guard Active-Duty Members*. Table 5.6.

³ Rand Corporation. (2021) *Improving the Representation of Women and Racial/Ethnic Minorities Among U.S. Coast Guard Active-Duty Members*. Table 6.4.

Enclosure (2)

alleged assaults only to be overruled by top leadership at the academy, according to records reviewed by CNN.⁴

Shortly after the initial CNN report, Admiral Linda Fagan emailed the entire Coast Guard workforce in which she said, “As your Commandant, I am personally committed to a culture of transparency and accountability regarding our efforts to prevent and address the scourge of sexual assault” and, “We own this failure, and on behalf of the United States Coast Guard, MCPOCG [Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard] and I apologize to each victim and your loved ones.”⁵

A letter from Congress dated July 13, 2023 stated “In fact, it seems likely that absent a media inquiry or some other spurring event, the existence of the Fouled Anchor investigation would never have become known to Congress or the public, much less to the CGA community. The failure of the Coast Guard—which is itself a law enforcement entity—to properly handle allegations of sexual assault among students at its own Academy is stunning and inexcusable. The Coast Guard’s subsequent choice to withhold information about what it had uncovered regarding its institutional failures is also deeply disappointing and frankly calls into question its commitment as a whole to address the institutional failures that are revealed in the harrowing findings of the Fouled Anchor investigation.”⁶

Of particular concern is the apparent lack of interest or desire in looking at any sexual assaults prior to 1992. The Leadership Team unequivocally knows sexual assault (once women entered the Academy in 1976) has been occurring at the Academy, yet no one in a leadership position is willing to acknowledge the historic significance of this. It also is possible that male survivors of harassment and assault live in the shadows from the shame long before 1976 and in the years since. Furthermore, no leaders have defined this as a systemic problem.

⁴ Blake Ellis, Melanie Hicken and Audrey Ash. “Criminal investigation into Coast Guard Academy revealed years of sexual assault cover-ups, but findings were kept secret.” [CNN](#). June 30, 2023.

⁵ Letter from Congressmen Jamie Raskin and Bennie G. Thompson. Congress of the United States. Addressed to Admiral Linda L. Fagan, Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard. Dated July 13, 2023.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Enclosure (2)

Helping Survivors of Military Sexual Trauma Access Veterans Administration Care

To determine if a Veteran rates disability compensation for a service-connected condition resulting from experiencing Military Sexual Trauma (MST), the Veteran must file a claim through the Veterans Benefits Agency (VBA).

Every VBA regional office has an MST Coordinator, someone trained to assist Veterans filing claims for MST-connected conditions. Since very few incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment are reported through official channels or have associated medical visits discoverable in the Veteran's active-duty medical record, VBA needs a complete official personnel file to verify claims of service-related trauma and determine a compensation rating.

For Coast Guard veterans, this presents a serious problem. Coast Guard personnel files are not all digitized and the service has just one person responding to requests for personnel files from ALL Coast Guard veterans. As a result, there is a 2-year backlog to receive files and no indication that victims of MST have "head of the line" privileges.

The DoD has a digitization process and automatic upload of personal files to the VBA portal. The Coast Guard does not.

Coast Guard Veterans and MST survivors are at a distinct disadvantage in accessing the benefits their counterparts in the other armed services receive in a timely fashion due solely to a lack of resources being devoted to fixing what appears to be an antiquated personnel records system.

If ever there was a problem that money could fix, this is it. If data sharing agreements between Coast Guard and VBA systems are a roadblock to the completion of this process, dedicated administrative support to clear the backlog of personnel record requests should be the priority of Coast Guard Personnel Command. The answer cannot be "we don't have the time or resources to help." Veteran Coast Guard MST Survivors deserve better.

To be clear, survivors of MST can access certain healthcare services at a VA Medical Center for conditions they experience related to the experience of MST. The burden of proof and requirement for documentation of corroborating evidence is not as stringent to get counseling at a VA Medical Center or VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic, but to rate disability and be compensated for conditions, Veterans must file a claim through VBA. Any service member who does not live near enough to a VA Medical Center or VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic must rely on and perhaps pay for counseling, medication, and healthcare services from a local provider for conditions related to MST. The determination that a condition is service connected would allow for the Veteran to receive care for those services and compensation from VBA to cover the care of health services.

The issue is timeliness of claims being adjudicated and compensation being granted. The administrative delay in the Coast Guard processing personnel file requests requires Coast Guard Veterans to wait years to have their claims processed, which means for years they are being asked additional, invasive questions and reliving the traumatizing events as they tell their story again and again.

Enclosure (3)

November 28, 2023

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, Chairman Webster, Ranking Member Carbajal, Chairman Green, Ranking Member Thompson, Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member Thanedar, Chairwoman Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, Chairwoman Baldwin, Ranking Member Sullivan, Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Paul, Chairman Blumenthal, and Ranking Member Johnson,

My name is K. Denise Rucker Krepp and I'm a former Maritime Administration Chief Counsel and former Coast Guard officer. I'm writing to you today to thank you for your investigations into the sexual harassment and rapes at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and in the service. Please hold the individuals who committed these crimes accountable for their actions and please hold the individuals who covered up these crimes accountable as well.

Dozens of survivors spanning decades of crime gathered at the Military Women's Memorial earlier this month to talk about rape at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and in the service at large. The event was billed as a healing opportunity. In reality it was a pain-ridden trip down memory lane for survivors who sat for eight hours listening to current Coast Guard leaders make hollow promises while the service rots because of past failed leadership.

Before my first cup of coffee, I learned about a woman who was raped shortly after joining the service. She never told her parents about the crime. While washing my hands in the bathroom another woman shared that she was raped while attending the Coast Guard Academy in the late 1990s. Another woman shared that she was gang-raped by three students at the school and had spent two thirds of her life on medication because of the crimes that occurred almost forty years ago.

I was simply sexually harassed as a young Coast Guard officer at Coast Guard headquarters in the late 1990s. I am also a survivor of retaliation and retribution by Coast Guard officers but the crimes committed against me pale in comparison to those committed against the dozens of women who sat in the audience with me.

One of the panels was entitled "Coast Guard Panel Accountability and Transparency - Building a More Accountable and Transparent Coast Guard" so I dutifully attended the session, because I genuinely thought that there would be a discussion on holding the admirals who created the toxic climate that tolerated the crimes accountable. I also mistakenly thought that there would be a discussion on holding the admirals who hid Operation Fouled Anchor from Congress and Coast Guard personnel accountable.

Neither happened so I politely stood up and asked the Coast Guard admiral who was talking about everything but accountability and transparency when both would occur. Looking up from the written answers that he'd been provided to recite, he shared that my question would be best directed to Admiral Fagan, the Commandant of the Coast Guard.

Two hours later, Admiral Fagan arrived with Admiral Thad Allen to give a summary of the day's events. She spoke about how going forward things would be different, there would be no more victims.

I too want my service to go forward but doing so requires a hard look in the rear view mirror so again I politely stood up. I shared that I was a survivor of sexual harassment and I asked when the admirals who failed to prosecute the crimes would be held accountable. I asked when the admirals who covered up the crimes would be held accountable. And then I waited for a response, still standing at attention.

Admiral Fagan angrily replied that she'd already apologized for past failures and that she was committed to ensuring that there would be no additional victims. And then she continued on talking about other things, glossing over the decades of pain staring at her from the seats in the first, second, tenth, and sixteenth rows of women.

Past systemic failed leadership destroyed lives and the cancer of failed leadership is destroying the health of today's Coast Guard. Current Coast Guard personnel are being told to trust their leaders but their leaders aren't holding their predecessors accountable for criminal behavior leading to a shocking lack of distrust in those at the top. For change to occur, Congress has to act. Congress must demand that Coast Guard officers who committed crimes and covered up crimes be recalled and prosecuted. Stop the rot before it completely destroys the Coast Guard.

Thank you.



K. Denise Rucker Krepp
Former Maritime Administration Chief Counsel and former Coast Guard officer

December 6, 2023

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland
Security & Governmental Affairs
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Paul, Chairman Blumenthal, and Ranking Member Johnson,

My name is K. Denise Rucker Krepp and I'm a former Maritime Administration Chief Counsel and former Coast Guard officer. I'm writing to you today to thank you for holding the December 12th hearing on sexual harassment and sexual assault at the US Coast Guard Academy and in the service.

The arc of sexual harassment and sexual assault in the Coast Guard spans 40 plus pained-filled years. At a recent Coast Guard event billed as a healing opportunity I spoke with a woman who was raped in the 1990s and she never told her parents. Another graduate shared that she was gang-raped.

After the event, a male survivor contacted me sharing his story of assault. A recent graduate posted this week on Instagram sharing that she too was raped at the school. Three times. First by a superior. The second time by a classmate. Third time by an international student.

I was simply sexually harassed as a young Coast Guard officer at Coast Guard headquarters in the late 1990s.

At the healing event I asked Admiral Fagan when the admirals who failed to prosecute the crimes would be held accountable. I asked when the admirals who covered up the crimes would be held accountable. And then I waited for a response, standing at attention.

Admiral Fagan angrily replied that she'd already apologized for past failures and that she was committed to ensuring that there would be no additional victims. Stunned by her deliberate refusal to hold past leaders accountable, I dispiritedly sat down.

Past systemic failed leadership destroyed lives and the cancer of failed leadership is destroying the health of today's Coast Guard. Please continue to hold hearings on the sexual assaults that have and are occurring in the Coast Guard. Please demand that past leaders, including those that I served with in the Coast Guard legal community, be held accountable. Please stop the rot.

Thank you.



K. Denise Rucker Krepp
Former Maritime Administration Chief Counsel and former Coast Guard officer



Opinion: The long afterlife of the Tailhook scandal

amp.cnn.com



Shame on those who failed to take Coast Guard sexual assault seriously

militarytimes.com



Op-Ed: Time to Investigate SASH Cover-Up at U.S. Coast Guard Academy

maritime-executive.com

Enclosure (4)

Written Testimony of Cadet Kyra Holmstrup
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
December 12, 2023

Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing. I am First Class (1/c) Cadet Kyra Holmstrup, a senior at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and President of Cadets Against Sexual Assault (CASA). I share my story to underscore the progress our Academy still must make and to offer recommendations based on my experience as CASA President. It has been a privilege to attend the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, and I am hopeful that together we can enact necessary and important changes to prevent and respond to sexual assault.

My story begins in my second week as a cadet in August 2020. I'd gotten close to a male classmate in the same training platoon. We were next door neighbors and friends. We both liked each other, and he asked me out on an ice cream date. Because of the pandemic, we were not allowed to be very close to each other indoors, so we headed outside and found a gazebo with picnic tables underneath. I had no idea what was about to happen to me.

To this day, I find myself short of words to describe the violation, helplessness, and fear that I felt that day. I reacted in the way we are taught to: I said "no," I said "I'm not that kind of girl," I said "no I don't like that." I forcefully removed his hands from my body, pushed him away, physically resisted him. I was always told that "no" was a powerful word. "No" to him was an invitation to try again.

For the first time in my life, I had no control over my body. I was frozen, staring at the trees around the gazebo as he forced himself on me. I was 19. It eventually ended after what felt like a lifetime. I went back to my room, showered, and crawled into bed early. A few hours later I woke to him sliding an apology letter under my door.

For the next few weeks, I tried to forget. That's when the harassment began. He told my friends that I was a "bitch" and a "snake," and blocked me from important Company communications when he feared I would share what happened. He made my life hell. One night, I asked to speak with an upperclass member of CASA. Our Academy rules dictated that we must have the doors open when speaking to upperclassmen. As I began to tell her what had happened to me, footsteps could be heard stopping just outside of my room. I quietly indicated to her that he may be outside, trying to listen in. She walked into the hallway and saw my attacker standing there listening to us. He reacted angrily, throwing open his door in a profanity-laced tirade. I was terrified. It was then that I resolved to make an unrestricted report (where command is notified, and an investigation is initiated) out of genuine fear for my safety.

You might assume my trauma stems from the physical attack I endured. While the attack certainly was traumatic, the treatment I experienced following my report is what continues to haunt me to this day. The Coast Guard Academy Command moved my attacker to a different Company within the same barracks and issued a No Contact Order (NCO), meaning he had to stay 20 feet away from me with no contact. Immediately, my classmates stopped talking to me. They wouldn't look me in the eyes. My attacker told anyone who would listen that I was a liar and that I was crazy. I felt incredibly alone. I thought the No Contact Order would protect me. It didn't. My

attacker would come near me and talk freely to friends about what happened, even after being directed by the prior Academy leadership to stop talking about my allegation within the Corps of Cadets. One day, during my Spring 2021 semester, my attacker approached my friends when I left to use the bathroom, asking where I went and when I would be back. My lawyer wanted to call the police, but I pleaded against doing so to prevent making a scene. Instead, the Chase Hall Duty Officer (an officer on duty for 24 hours in charge of cadet safety) was called to direct my attacker to keep his distance, but he only casually reminded him that he had been issued a No Contact Order.

Despite my attacker's blatant violations of orders, my SVC told me no meaningful action would be taken, and that his conduct may not have even been a violation. My attacker continued to cross boundaries. Prior Academy leadership seemed unbothered or unwilling to bring charges for these clear violations, and instead only increased the distance he was required to stay away from me.

Throughout the entire process, my Special Victims Counsel kept telling me that the moment my attacker was charged, he would be removed from the Academy grounds. My SVC told me there was a precedent for this—when there was enough evidence to bring charges against a cadet, they would be moved to another unit. This *would* have happened, if not for the National Defense Authorization Act in January 2021 which eliminated the ability for my attacker to be removed from campus. My hope was waning.

Court-martial-eligible charges were initiated against my attacker by the Superintendent (or, as the military says, preferred) in the spring of 2021: Article 128 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, Assault Consummated by a Battery. My attacker received the case file, which included my statement and interview. This was his right as a criminal defendant. What my attacker did next was terrible. He openly shared these intensely intimate, traumatic pieces of evidence with my classmates. He exposed my entire, incredibly personal interview with CGIS. I was devastated and thought for sure this must be a violation of regulations governing cadets. After telling my SVC what occurred, he said the best they could do was ask my attacker's defense attorney to stop him from showing it to more cadets.

After the spring semester, I departed for my summer training assignment in May 2021. In July, a Non-Judicial Punishment, also known as a Flag Mast, was determined to be the means of adjudication, and communicated to me through my SVC. This meant my attacker would be kicked out of the Academy. My SVC said this was as good a result as I would get. While I was traveling back to the Academy to give my impact statement to the Academy Superintendent conducting the Non-Judicial Punishment, two SVCs called me. It was then that I learned my attacker was going to receive an Honorable Discharge. The SVCs also told me he would have no record and would be allowed to re-enlist in the military. I broke down in the middle of the airport. My attacker was able to walk away with almost no consequences. Nobody would know what he did to me, and nothing was stopping him from returning to military service. He was emboldened—bragging and sharing his excitement with others about re-enlisting. All I wanted to do was stop him from being able to do again what he did to me. That didn't happen.

During my sophomore year, I joined Cadets Against Sexual Assault and started my journey of healing. I felt hopeless and invisible when going through my case, but by helping other cadets, I felt like I was able to become the person I once needed within the Corps of Cadets. For the past two years as President of CASA, I have worked closely with the Sexual Assault Response

Coordinator (SARC) and the Victim Advocate Program Specialist (VAPS). The role of a CASA member within the Corps of Cadets is to be a peer educator, a mentor, and an advocate for change. We develop and deliver training and host events around campus to help victims and survivors feel supported while bringing awareness to the issues cadets face. And we are there when cadets seek help and support. CASA leadership and its liaisons are trained to shepherd victims to SARCs and VAPS who can rally expert services and assistance. Over the past four years I have interacted with, and I would like to believe helped, numerous victims and survivors. I believe that we have made progress in the realm of cadet sexual assault. However, there is much more to be done.

With the release of recent CNN articles detailing years of hidden internal investigations and cover-ups, cadets feel disillusioned. Many are hesitant to trust leadership. Further, cadets are grappling with the hollowness of the messages from their senior leaders. They tell us to be leaders of character, while failing to heed their own counsel. There is substantial institutional trauma at the Coast Guard Academy and throughout the Coast Guard. This must be addressed. Academy leadership has fallen short in doing so. Leadership has struggled to provide satisfactory answers to the cadets on Operation Fouled Anchor (OFA). In the recently released memorandum, "Commandant's Directed Actions – Accountability and Transparency," we are told "the mishandling of sexual assault and rape cases reviewed in the Operation Fouled Anchor investigations is unlikely to be repeated." We would like to know more about this.

There are bright spots and signs of hope. Current Academy leadership has taken some steps to improve the barracks by seeking to install new locks for our barracks doors and cameras in each hallway. And our Assistant Superintendent has been a great supporter and advocate for CASA, helping to secure \$100,000 for the Academy's Sexual Assault Prevention, Response and Recovery (SAPRR) office, around \$40,000 of which will go directly to the CASA program.

However, there is still much to be done to improve the reporting process and culture of the Academy. We need your help. In my short career, I have learned that it often takes Congressional intervention to effect meaningful change. I therefore hope you may consider the following recommendations:

1. Any cadet who is disenrolled from the Academy due to a NJP for sexual assault or sexual harassment must not be allowed to re-enlist in the military.
 - a. Many victims only want to stop the perpetrator from causing more harm. When I was told that there was nothing that prevented my attacker from re-enlisting and no records would indicate why he left the Academy if he attended another university, I was devastated. This must change.
 - b. Cadets found to have committed an assault or harassment at NJP should not be afforded the privilege of enlisting in any military service.
2. NCOs must be enforced on campus, through the Cadet Regulations, UCMJ provisions, or other means for the safety of all parties involved.
 - a. The Cadet Regulations and Cadet Conduct Manual outlines ways that cadets are held accountable for violating a regulation. The administrative

repercussions take the form of demerits and restriction to base. These administrative actions are very common.

- b. As an NCO is an order from command, violating the order can be punished under the UCMJ or Cadet Regulations.
 - c. Many cadets feel that the current manner in which NCOs are (or are not) enforced allows for the accused to go unchecked and does not help the victim feel safe throughout investigation and adjudication processes.
3. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2021, Sec. 539, Policy for Military Service Academies on Separation of Alleged Victims and Alleged Perpetrators in Incidents of Sexual Assault, must be revisited with cadet and other stakeholder input to promote safety and proper regulation of the unique military service academy environment.
- a. Section 539 of the 2021 NDAA states that “The Secretary of Defense shall, in consultation with the Secretaries of the military departments and the Superintendent of each military service academy, prescribe in regulations a policy under which a cadet or midshipman of a military service academy who is the alleged victim of a sexual assault and a cadet or midshipman who is the alleged perpetrator of such assault shall, to the extent practicable, each be given the opportunity to complete their course of study at the academy without— (1) taking classes together; or (2) otherwise being in close proximity to each other during mandatory activities.”
 - b. During the fall semester of 2022, when I was a junior, members of Congress attended a meeting at the Academy with our Affinity Group representatives. There I discussed the barriers we faced at the Academy, one being the implementation of the 2021 NDAA. One Congressman said that he had helped write Sec. 539 and they forgot to invite a U.S. Coast Guard Academy representative to discuss the unique environment and layout of the Academy. He said he would follow up, but that has not yet happened.
 - c. The Coast Guard Academy is little more than 100 acres in size. Our buildings, including academic and athletic halls, barracks, and the like occupy a much smaller footprint than other military academies. As such, it is very difficult to effectively separate victims from accused cadets within our small campus. Provisions within Section 539 compound this problem.
 - d. Cadet victims and survivors have confided that they did not make an unrestricted report because of the fear of both parties remaining on campus. Instead, they suffer silently until they graduate and are able to physically separate from their attacker.

- e. By including representatives from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in discussions on improving Sec. 539 of the 2021 NDAA, Congress would be better informed of impacts to the smaller Coast Guard Academy campus.
4. Special Victims Counsels (SVCs) must be afforded the opportunity to review the entirety of the case file for their client in order to give the best and most informed counsel. Furthermore, SVCs should not be first-year lawyers and should have a working knowledge of the Coast Guard Academy and its peculiar Cadet regulations before working with cadet victims.
- a. While I appreciated having an SVC on my case, I would be remiss if I didn't discuss the lack of understanding and inability to adequately advocate for me during the process.
 - b. The intent of the SVCs was to close the feedback loop and advocate for the best interests of the victim.
 - c. There are a few different routes to become a lawyer in the Coast Guard. The most common are the Funded Law Program that existing officers and enlisted members of the Coast Guard apply for or the Direct Commission Officers who enter the Coast Guard from civilian life.
 - d. Many SVCs are first year lawyers within the Coast Guard. Some have attended the Academy but are new to the practice of law. Some are civilians thrust into service with little understanding of the Coast Guard and, often, no knowledge of the operations of the Coast Guard Academy.
 - e. My SVC was a Direct Commission Lawyer and did not understand Academy life and rules. This led to a disconnect when explaining what I was experiencing.
 - f. Further, as SVCs are neither the prosecutor nor the defense attorneys, they are not entitled to the case file. Instead, they must counsel based solely on the statements from the victim and whatever information is shared from the prosecutors and command. Thus, SVCs are unable to adequately provide counsel to the victims, prepare them for trial, or advocate for them as they do not have the full picture.
5. The U.S. Coast Guard Academy must adopt the Safe-to-Report policy that each Service Academy follows.
- a. The U.S. Coast Guard Academy is the only service academy that has not adopted the Safe-to-Report policy. This policy protects victims of sexual assault from being penalized for any collateral misconduct that occurred surrounding the assault, such as underage drinking or being behind closed doors with the opposite sex.

- b. Many cadets are scared to come forward if they violated a Cadet Regulation, even if they were sexually assaulted, because of potential repercussions for those violations.
- c. The Safe-to-Report policy would alleviate the barriers to reporting as underage drinking and minor collateral misconduct cannot be pursued against the victim.

While there have been some steps taken to improve the issues we currently face at the Coast Guard Academy, without the help of Congress, victims will not be adequately supported or advocated for during the reporting process. I stayed in the Coast Guard because I believe in a brighter future for our institution. With your help, we can make that future a reality.

Thank you for your time.

Written Testimony of Caitlin E. Maro
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
December 12, 2023

Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Johnson, and distinguished members of this subcommittee, I thank you for your time and attention to a matter that is well overdue for action. My name is Caitlin E. Maro (nee Stopper) and I am a former member of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy Class of 2008. It is my sincere prayer that this testimony will shed lasting light on a dark corner of one of our government's uniformed services.

This is not the first time that I've appeared before you and your colleagues. I first told my story to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2006 after the Coast Guard Academy charged a fellow cadet with sexual assault. He was the first-ever student court-martialed in its 147-year history. The press coverage was enraging; the Academy had the gall to claim that the charges against this cadet were proof that its existing sexual assault policies worked. But I know, as well as others on today's panel, that nothing could have been further from the truth. It was at that time that I contacted a writer at the Associated Press covering the story to share my own experience. The stories he published led to an opportunity for me to speak to your colleagues in the House of Representatives.

I entered the Academy in June of 2004. I beamed with pride the first time I put on that uniform. I had turned down numerous NCAA Division I rowing scholarships as well as an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy to serve my country in the Coast Guard. I am the great-great-granddaughter of a drummer who led Union soldiers into battle at both Antietam and Gettysburg; the great-great-granddaughter of a Navy sailor who died on the USS Maine in Havana Harbor; the great-granddaughter of Navy sailors; and the grandniece of a Women's Army Corps soldier who served on both fronts in both World Wars. I wanted that family tradition to continue through me, but what happened during my service wasn't glorious—it was dark, abusive, and humiliating. It almost left me for dead.

The moment that Swab Summer ended in the summer of 2004 was the moment I started to experience daily sexual harassment. It became routine for me to field emails, text messages, and verbal comments from fellow cadets soliciting sex, or dehumanizing comments about my body. I knew, even then at 18 years old, that serving as a woman in the U.S. Coast Guard was going to be challenging, but I did not think that the service was filled with ravenous wolves throughout the chain of command.

It was not just comments that I endured. I was groped numerous times around campus, sometimes with 20-30 witnesses. The first instance occurred in the Alpha Company Day Room, which served as a student lounge, with about 20-30 of my fellow Fourth Class (freshmen). We were crammed into a small room and fighting over space on two large couches that were set up in an "L" formation. I ended up crammed into the corner of the "L". The couches were already full when a male cadet pushed our fellow classmates aside so he could sit next to me. I turned to give him a disapproving look and he looked right back at me, licked his lips, and put his hand between my legs and groped my crotch. I pushed his hand away and he fought back, laughing. My struggle

caught the attention of the other cadets in the room and they started laughing and egging him on. We were then immediately interrupted by the upperclassmen who had called the meeting and the meeting began as if nothing happened. I kept my mouth shut.

The other instances of groping occurred mostly during swim class by the same classmate who assaulted me in the Day Room. He would swim up to me underwater and touch whatever part of my body he pleased. This happened too often to count. Being in a swimsuit in front of him was absolutely humiliating. I was a piece of meat to him. But again, I kept my mouth shut.

I couldn't escape the solicitations and the assaults at the Academy. I tried to complete my school assignments by sneaking off to various sports buildings after dark with a flashlight simply to escape the barrage and focus on my studies. I even tried to study in empty baseball dugouts in the rain! The barracks were not safe and neither was the library. My grades plummeted as a result, and the only thing scarier than the barracks was my chain of command.

When I needed to start facing my academic failings in January of 2005, I confided in a civilian professor. I broke down and told him everything despite my better judgment. I begged him for help. In a subsequent email from this professor to the Alpha Company Commander, the professor claimed that I showed "signs of instability" in the meeting. My allegations of harassment were brushed aside as evidenced in an email I discovered in August in my cadet file. Yet, I still had to answer for my allegations of assault and harassment, and the Commander reluctantly questioned me about the allegations after the Assistant Commandant of Cadets prompted him. "Is this worth investigating?" the Commander asked me in a closed-door meeting. "I don't know," I answered, desperate to be freed from the room next door to where I was assaulted three months prior. I was then dismissed from the meeting without further questioning.

My depression was crushing at this point. I wanted to die, to just disappear and be forgotten. I began hiding in my metal wardrobe locker to escape. One day soon after my meeting with the Commander, my boyfriend at the time came looking for me. He pulled me from my locker and I fell to the floor a sobbing mess, a shell of a person, a person that desperately wanted to end her life. It was then that my boyfriend called my mother directly, desperate for help, knowing he would not get it from our chain of command—the same chain of command, mind you, that is tasked with protecting and developing the young cadets on campus. It was only after my mother got involved that an investigation ensued. And here is where my nightmare truly began.

Now furious, the Commander pulled me back into another closed-door meeting to question me. "We didn't initially investigate because we figured that this happened on a date. You *do* have blonde hair and wear makeup," he stated as his rationale for not investigating my allegations in the first place. I said nothing and let them investigate. What was there to say? I was now only 19 years old. The Commander was in his 30s and he held my career in his hands.

I was then commanded to begin counseling sessions with a male civilian counselor on the Academy grounds. However, it became clear to me within the first session that this wasn't a counseling session, but rather an attempt to gather incriminating information from me. My sexual history was the main subject of discussion. In violation of a direct order, I refused to return for more sessions.

The only person who spoke up for me was my boyfriend at the time. Not the women that I helped push over the wall on the obstacle course during Swab Summer. Or the men that I carried on my back during swim tests because they couldn't swim. I had helped so many of my fellow classmates through their struggles, but when I needed them to testify to what they had witnessed, they were silent. Yet, who can blame barely-of-age cadets who were subject to the bias and whims of officers who were crafted and cured within such a broken service? I learned very quickly after arriving at the Academy that the more stripes on a person's shoulders, the bigger the threat they posed. This threat is why I hid from my superiors for months and then finally turned to a civilian professor for help once the pressure was too much to bear.

The resulting investigation was as shameful and humiliating as the assaults themselves. My fellow cadets abandoned me; they let doors slam in my face, created humiliating nicknames for me, and spread particularly ugly rumors. All of this because I dared to accuse a fellow cadet of assault. I knew then that my career in the U.S. Coast Guard was over before it even began. Unable to endure the atmosphere and fearing for my safety, I requested to be separated from the Academy before the investigation's conclusion. I was honorably discharged from the Coast Guard in February of 2005.

I found out from CNN that my case was included in Operation Fouled Anchor. Not from an Academy representative. Not from CGIS. Not from Congress. The news was broken to me by the press, over the phone, while I was wiping my child's runny nose. The reporter from the Associated Press listened to me back in 2006 and hunted the Academy's wolves as best he could. Reporters from CNN picked up the baton after a whistleblower handed them the Operation Fouled Anchor report in the late spring. Notice who the whistleblower leaked the report to—the press. Can the press now hand the baton to you, Senators? Can we, as a country, finally begin to rebuild our Coast Guard? Can we be sure that our nation's young adults will receive the training—and treatment—they need to keep our shores secure? A broken Coast Guard is a threat to our national security.

Your first step is to demand accountability. Know our names. Know our stories and hunt the wolves. Trust cannot be restored in the U.S. Coast Guard and the government at large until accountability is established.

Melissa K. McCafferty
Written Testimony

**Testimony of Melissa K. McCafferty
Before the U.S. Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
December 12, 2023**

For twelve years, I was a proud member of the United States Coast Guard. On July 2, 2007, I entered the Academy gates and began my journey. Four years later, on May 18, 2011, I graduated with high honors, received my Commission, and began my active-duty Coast Guard Career.

While a freshman at the Academy, I experienced my first sexual assault. A male cadet in his second year befriended me and invited me to visit New York City with him. I had already established strict friends-only boundaries, and he assured me that he would book us separate hotel rooms. I grew up in a small village in Michigan and had never been to the Big Apple, so I agreed. When I arrived at the hotel, I learned he had reserved only one room. I also quickly realized this person was *not* my friend. For three days, he repeatedly raped me. When I returned to the Academy, I told no one. I feared that if I reported this incident, I would face discipline. My fears were not unfounded; I later witnessed the restriction of a classmate who was brave enough to report a rape. To add insult to injury, Senior Leaders permitted her rapist to graduate and receive his Commission. To my knowledge, he is still serving today.

My second sexual assault occurred during my third year at the Academy. I was asleep in my barracks room when an intoxicated classmate broke in, climbed into my bed, and began undoing his shorts. Thankfully, I was able to stop him from going any further. I escorted my inebriated classmate to his room, put him to bed, and never spoke of the incident again.

The impact of these assaults on my life cannot be understated. My sense of trust in others, safety, self-worth, confidence, and emotional security were devastated.

As a result of this, I became increasingly fearful around men in the Coast Guard. I could not be alone with them in a room without being overly alert, having 911 on speed-dial, and becoming close to—or having—a PTSD-related flashback. I followed strict rules to protect myself from the men with whom I served, including refusing to go anywhere alone with them, dining alone with them, or even going to less-crowded public spaces with them. Even though I intuitively knew that not all Coast Guard men were predators, I felt I had to take every step possible to keep myself safe. I saw risk everywhere. It was just easier to keep my male colleagues at arm's length in order to protect myself. In fact, the impacts of these assaults and my struggle to cope with them transcended the Coast Guard: I became afraid to be alone in a room with any man, including, devastatingly enough, my own brother.

Over the course of my Coast Guard career, I unfortunately witnessed a culture that shields Senior Leaders at the expense of women—and men—who experience sexual harassment, assault, bullying, retaliation, and more. This culture is not limited to the Coast Guard Academy. Rather, it is ever-present in the fleet as well. While serving, I functioned as a Victim Advocate to a newly reported enlisted woman at a small boat station who was coerced by her second in command into

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having sex with him. I've consoled a colleague who was transferred from his unit due to "excessive drinking" after reporting a rape. I've sent flowers to the funerals of members who have died by suicide, knowing that one of the reasons they refused to seek help is because they were afraid that nothing would be done and, even worse: that it would ultimately end up hurting them or ending their careers.

The emotional toll of Coast Guard missions is hard enough to bear without incurring the additional damage inflicted by Senior Leaders who know what is wrong but fail to take any action. Not only has the Coast Guard failed to remedy this toxic culture, but at times, I have witnessed leadership going so far as to protect the offenders. I fear that the cost of their failure has endangered the mental and physical health of too many women and men in the Coast Guard. Some regrettably do not survive. For others, it is a lifetime of scars and mistrust.

Myself, I opted for suicide. Between what I had witnessed in the fleet and what was done to me by those I was supposed to trust, I figured suicide was the best way to find any semblance of relief. So, on December 3, 2017, for the first time in my life, I gave up. Chasing hundreds of pills with a bottle of champagne, I flat lined in the ambulance and at the hospital.

My recovery journey was extremely difficult and frankly, I am lucky to be alive. For most of 2017 and 2018, I wanted to die more days than not. In the period of a year, I was institutionalized for eleven of the twelve months. Had I not been, I would have succeeded in killing myself.

I isolated myself from friends and family. Decade-long relationships were strained or ruined and I was unable to work, let alone leave my house. I was unable to make rational decisions and had my mother take charge of my finances. I was always one drink away from insanity, one flashback away from further institutionalization, and one step away from losing what little basis of reality I had left.

Four separate medical providers stated that my PTSD was so severe and so complex that I would require extensive long-term care and ongoing treatment. My prognosis from all four was poor.

Despite the grim prognosis and unfavorable odds, with the unwavering and relentless support from my family, my friends, a 12-step community, and my medical providers, I was able to recover, and achieve stability and sobriety. I regained my sanity, graduated law school, and am now successfully employed. Most importantly, I am not only healthy, but I am happy as well.

I am here today because, despite everything that happened, I love the Coast Guard and am passionate about its missions and its people. I am here today because it is beyond time for Senior Leaders to do better and to be better.

This begins with accountability. Too often, Coast Guard Senior Leaders have punished junior officers, mid-grade officers, and enlisted members for their "misdeeds" but have failed to police themselves. Too many times, Senior Leaders have interceded, overturning recommendations—and at times, convictions—made by independent parties. Senior Leaders have also permitted members to quietly resign or retire in lieu of receiving punishment or adverse documentation. For

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members who are able to quietly retire, they are subsequently afforded military honors and a fully funded government pension. This double standard is simply unacceptable. If this institution is to change, Senior Leaders must first be loyal to the Coast Guard rather than to themselves.

This means applying the Coast Guard Code of Conduct fairly and equally to all members of the service. Senior Leaders who break the rules should not be protected from the consequences of their actions.

To illustrate the necessity of holding Senior Leaders accountable, I need only to direct your attention to the recent reports concerning several failed attempts by Senior Leaders to conceal and bury damaging reports: (1) Operation Fouled Anchor, (2) the highly visible case of Glenn Sulmasy, and (3) the 2015 Culture of Respect Report.

Despite these reports, which document widespread abuse, hazing, sexual misconduct, retaliation, harassment, and racism alongside selective enforcement, concealment, and evasion of accountability, Senior Leaders continue to remain defiant in the face of well-documented truths. This disturbing pattern is further documented in the personal accounts of numerous Coast Guard service members with whom I've been in touch. Several of these individuals have asked me to share their anonymous personal accounts with the Subcommittee, which I will submit as an addendum to this testimony.

Lamenting a decades-long "disconnect" between the Coast Guard's desired culture and actual experiences, Coast Guard Senior Leaders continue to deflect responsibility and misplace blame, placing it instead on the shoulders of enlisted members along with junior and mid-grade officers. In vowing to enact change through action-items such as increased oversight of the Cadet Corps at the Academy and by expanding bystander intervention training, Senior Leaders continue to miss the very obvious, and critical, point: none of these efforts will matter until Senior Leaders are finally willing to adhere to the rules, enforce the law, and exercise integrity themselves.

From the beginning of my time at the Academy until the day I retired, I was repeatedly told that as a Commissioned Officer, how we behave and what we do matters. Actions matter. Consequences—both intended and unintended—matter. All of this matters and not just to those below, but to those above and outside of our organization as well. To that end, perception is reality. Whether today's Senior Leaders created this problem or contributed to it, they ultimately bear the responsibility and obligation to fix it.

It should come as no surprise that trust in the organization is eroding. Given the repeated failures by Coast Guard Senior Leaders to promote transparency, to enforce the law, and to hold members accountable who are involved in any misconduct, they have not just further eroded organizational trust but have destroyed it altogether.

The integrity of the Coast Guard and the lives of those it is charged to protect depends on the ability of Senior Leaders to unequivocally act with courage, conviction, and character. To do the right thing, no matter the consequence. To embody the Coast Guard Core Values, no matter the

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cost. To even-handedly apply and enforce the law, regardless of who that member is or what rank they hold.

Only once Senior Leaders are willing to lead with integrity and to indiscriminately fulfill their Oath, can they ensure the success of the Coast Guard, its people, and its culture. Until this occurs, however, the Coast Guard will continue to remain lost and adrift.

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
Hearing: US Coast Guard Academy and Sexual Assault
Testimony of Service Women's Action Network
12 December 2023

Good morning, Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Johnson, and members of this very important subcommittee. Your continual and tenacious oversight will be key on this issue and so many others.

I wanted to make sure we mention that because we didn't have the benefit of fully processing the Coast Guard materials from last Wednesday afternoon, including the ATR,¹ before submitting this written testimony, you will find that many of our recommendations mirror what the Coast Guard proposes. Of course, the keys will be appropriate resourcing, sustained follow through, and vigorous oversight by Service leadership at all levels and DHS.

On behalf of the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN), a non-profit non-partisan 501(c)(3) with over 10,000 members that has advocated for close to 20 years to eliminate sexual assault and sexual harassment in the uniformed services and to change a culture that allows or encourages problematic and even criminal behavior that damages people, readiness and national security,² thank you for the opportunity to give you one more perspective on the sexual assault at the US Coast Guard Academy and the larger issues surrounding that. I also honor the courage of the women sitting beside me for coming forward to tell their stories. I'm here to give you a policy perspective and some comparisons with the Military Service

¹ "Coast Guard Publishes Accountability and Transparency Review Report and Commandant's Directed Actions," US Coast Guard Headquarters Press Release, 6 December 2023.

² *Women in the Military: Where They Stand*, Service Women's Action Network, www.servicewomen.org, 2019

Academies and DOD which are under different authorities most of the time. You have my short resume, I served in the Air Force for 26 years mostly in technical intelligence, but I also taught at our Academy twice and during my MA and PhD studies in military history one focus was on women in the Services.

Returning to these brave women, and others here, inviting them validates and honors their suffering and survival. More importantly, their being here shows that you are not just talking about esoteric policy and legislation. We are talking about real people who could very well be our sisters, daughters, grandchildren, or others close to you.

First, thank you again for shining a light on these problems at this Academy and in the Coast Guard. I hope the Homeland Security, Armed Services, and Veterans Affairs Committees will all help create more cooperation between the Armed Services and the other Uniformed Services since many of our challenges are the same or related, and we often work together operationally. We thank DOD for its not perfect but renewed emphasis on improving the military culture and climate. And, we believe the Coast Guard may now be serious and sincere about implementing a sustained and continuous emphasis to solve its admitted problems. We believe Congress, DOD, DHS, DOJ, the VA, and the Coast Guard together can improve national and homeland security by attacking this complex problem.³ Many Veterans and Military Service Organizations (VSOs/MSOs) and other organizations stand by to assist you.

Unfortunately, we old ones, see “ground hog day” over and over again. There is a problem, it goes public, energy is put into policies and training, then we “fire and forget” thinking we’ve solved it. But really these are persistent cultural problems

³ Interagency Agreements and Memoranda of Agreement and Understanding already exist in many areas

that continue and they will reemerge into the public eye.⁴ Just because it's not in the news every day, doesn't mean it's not a problem every day and doing the same thing over and over again, is not going to yield long term success. Some will continue to commit crimes with impunity, people will suffer, readiness and effectiveness will be reduced, people will continue to move relatively quickly, we will forget why we did some things, and some leaders will continue to fail in their responsibilities with many not being held to account.

What's missing?

1. **Oversight:** I've already mentioned sustained oversight and effort by Congress, the Departments and the Services are the first most important thing. A central challenge for the Coast Guard is that oversight has been mixed and scattered. They need this sustained oversight up and down the chain from the most senior to the most junior leaders, officer and enlisted, and among uniformed and civilian personnel.⁵ We trust that current Coast Guard leadership is sincere and they are very aware of issues they have grown up with. They should be regularly reporting, obviously more than they had been, to DHS and Congress to enable oversight and focus and to reestablish some trust.
2. **Combine Efforts:** Relationships should be even tighter than they are between DHS, DOD, the Coast Guard, and the Service Academies to share best practices and combine research efforts more than they do. We believe

⁴ "The Dangerous Cycle of Pentagon Sexual Assault and Harassment 'Lowest Level' Policy", Ashley Merryman, *Lawfare*, 12 April, 2023. Although Merryman is writing about the problems with the 'reporting at the lowest level' policy, she describes the repeating cycle of scandals making the news, often inept fixes, and then reoccurrence in another Service in another form, and so it goes. Other recent opinion pieces describe the same. See also, US Coast Guard Force Readiness Command, Culture of Respect (COR) Integrated Process Team (IPT) Phase I Report April 2015.

⁵ There is no Service Secretary between DHS Secretary and USCG Commandant. They do have the Secretary of the Navy when assigned to the Navy, which is rarely.

the new “Accountability and Transparency Review Report” that was released on 5 December 2023 outlines some new efforts and we are still processing that. Programs between DOD and the Coast Guard that could maximize efforts would include the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response programs,⁶ DOD SAPRO’s reports and On-Site Inspections and Evaluations and the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services,⁷ and research and surveys on the Military Service Academies should include USCGA (and the Merchant Marine Academy), and implementing any recommendations from the DOD Independent Review Commission not already included in Coast Guard plans. The Coast Guard has also established an independent Office of Special Trial Counsel but we’re not sure if that is completely outside the chain of command and reports to DHS and DOJ. Lowest level commanders still have a lot of control of reporting and turning cases over with the option to go the administrative punishment route rather than turning cases over to law enforcement. They still may not ever see the light of the OSTC. To the extent they haven’t been yet, the Coast Guard should incorporate the military justice reforms from NDAA 2022 and 2023 as well as this year’s Executive Order. The Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) and Manual for Court Martial (MCM)⁸ should be reviewed again to inform how closely the Coast Guard is bound to them and where

⁶ Better yet is the example of the programs that combine anti-sexual harassment and bullying and sexual assault under SHARP to recognize a “continuum of harm” that should not be separated into HR and EEO.

⁷ DACOWITS was established in 1951. It includes USGC liaisons and, in the past, included retired USCG members. USCG submits reports and briefings. But sometimes, USCG demurs from collecting data or offering briefings/reports as “not part of DOD” and DACOWITS does not do USCG site visits “because the USCG is not part of DOD.” An IAA or MOU is needed. RADM Coast Guard (Retired) and former DACOWITS member Cari Batson Thomas, wrote a letter 27 November presented as public comment for the 5 December 2023 meeting recommending that DACOWITS include both the USCGA and MMA in their own review of SAPROs MSA report of 2023, and in future years that the USCG be included in SAPRO’s review of the Services every two years.

⁸ Approval of Supplemental Materials for the Manual for Courts-Martial (2024 edition), 28 October 2023, General Counsel of the Department of Defense.

additional IAAs and MOUs between DOD, DHS, and DOJ should be instituted. If not already, the Coast Guard should also be a subject of the Defense Advisory Committee on Investigation, Prosecution, and Defense (DAC-IPAD) and the Military Justice Reform Panel (MJRP)

3. **Independent Investigations:** Institutions should conduct their own investigations. As recent cases show, But they must have outside reviews too. In the first instance, the DHS IG has investigated what happened in some cases including LCDR Young-McLear's case.⁹ But it is also unforgivable that the entire Coast Guard chain of command could not resolve that case with corrective individual and institutional action of its own. And, that goes with the genesis of this hearing I believe, "hiding the ball" on the part of previous leaders at many levels, engenders a growing lack of trust between Congress, the Services, and USCG members as well as the public. A revived and energetic Board of Visitors, as the Coast Guard recommends would be another key. And again, the USCG and USCGA should be covered with DOD SAPRO and DACOWITS efforts. If Congress wants an even more independent look it could, between committees, direct more reports by GAO, OPA, RAND or other FFRDCs, or universities with special expertise in gender, racial, ethnic, and religious relations in the Uniformed Services.
4. **Reporting and Accountability:** Holding perpetrators and failed leaders accountable is a circular problem with reporting. The USCG "Fouled Anchor" report and others show that reports will be ignored, those who report are stigmatized or ostracized, and many have been retaliated against

⁹ DHS IG Report, OIG-20-36, 3 June 2020, substantiating the complaint and enforcing corrective action in a letter from the then Secretary of DHS to the then Commandant of the USCG, news reports, and testimony of LCDR Young-McLear, former USCGA instructor, to the U.S. House of Representatives on 11 December 2019 on bullying, harassment, and retaliation from 2014-2018.

affecting their evaluations, assignments, and promotions as well as retention. In order for changes to take hold, cases of sexual assault must be made public (respecting confidentiality) as others may be inspired to come forward with further evidence and so that when victims and other members of units move, they can still follow progress and outcomes including accusations, arrests, investigations, prosecutions, convictions or exonerations. This creates transparency and transparency equals trust. Evidence shows that even if a case results in acquittal, alleged victims can respect the integrity of the process. For those found guilty or who are administratively punished, even junior men reported in surveys that only consistent and severe enough punishment to “screw up somebodies life” will send the message of not tolerating this behavior. Those subjected to harassment and assault must also be able to trust that bystanders will report. I know there is new training; its effectiveness must be continually assessed

5. **Anticipatory Leadership:** Everyone must count on all leaders to handle reports properly instead of, as reported, protecting their own reputation or their institutions.¹⁰ Leaders must anticipate challenges in all areas of their units of whatever size. This is one they seem to avoid in every regard until it hits them in the face. As reported, we must have a standard of “what leaders knew, or should have known.” Our leaders, from mid-range to senior NCOs and from junior officers to 4-stars must not just mouth the words of “zero-tolerance,” not just provide one more power-point lecture or virtual course, not just support briefings by “expert” civilians perceived as not being in touch with military reality, and not just brief and train only the

¹⁰ “Fouled Anchor” Investigation – Final Report, US Coast Guard, 31 January 2020. Fouled Anchor Command Accountability Disposition Decision and Completion of Consolidated Disposition Authority Duties, US Coast Guard, 9 July 2019.

women, and, by all means, not on a voluntary basis; volunteering can be stigmatizing for men and women. Our leaders have to constantly ask themselves, what are we modeling for cadets about how to be the leaders we expect them to be when they graduate? The problem only grows when they go into active service whether as survivors or criminals.

6. **VA Outreach:** Finally, please work with the Veterans Affairs Committee to require the VA to conduct specific outreach to Coast Guard Academy graduates enrolled back to 1970s-80s. The VA does a lot of excellent outreach for a lot of reasons and they are getting better at it. The Coast Guard tried at the end of the “Fouled Anchor” investigation to ask the victims if they wanted help. But things have changed, such as the burden of evidence to substantiate MST claims and the VA has been working on better ways to conduct the claims process to work (that needs to improve further). With “Fouled Anchor,” while it looks like we can’t go back in the legal or administrative system to hold not only perpetrators but failed leaders accountable, we could try again to let Veteran survivors know they have earned benefits and help that the nation should provide them.

“Fouled Anchor” Investigation – Final Report – January 31, 2020

“Academy leadership often failed to undertake sufficient action to ensure a safe environment—particularly for female cadets—and instill a culture intolerant of any form of sexual misconduct; they did not promote and maintain a climate conducive to reporting incidents of sexual assault; and they did not adequately investigate alleged offenses as serious criminal matters and hold perpetrators appropriately accountable.”

“The rumors that existed about other girls who reported assaults were awful and they eventually left the service because they were not taken seriously and, in some cases, blamed for their assaults. I hid the assaults from everyone that I knew, including my family and closest friends.”

**Former Cadet from
the 1990s**

An estimated **51%** of cadet women have had an experience which met criteria for sexual harassment in the past year.

28.3% of female cadets said they've experienced unwanted sexual contact since entering the Academy.

Only **15%** of female cadets who experienced unwanted sexual contact in the last year reported it.

(2021 U.S. Coast Guard Service Academy (USCGA) Gender Relations Survey)

December 8, 2023

The Honorable Senator Blumenthal (D-CT)
Chairman
Senate Homeland Security Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

Dear Senator Blumenthal,

I am submitting this letter for the record ahead of your hearing on December 12, 2023 titled "Coast Guard Academy Whistleblowers: Stories of Sexual Assault & Harassment." As you are aware, exactly four years ago, I testified before the House Homeland Security and Government & Oversight Committees in a joint hearing called "Righting the Ship: The Coast Guard Must Improve It's Process for Addressing Harassment, Bullying, and Retaliation." In my testimony, and as I have shared publicly since 2016, there continues to be a culture of sexual assault, bullying, harassment, discrimination, and retaliation within the Coast Guard. There continues to be cycles of abuse and violence, including at the highest ranks. When senior leaders abuse their power, this perpetuates dangerous cycles and a culture where perpetrators are protected and promoted, while victims are targeted, punished, and ultimately pushed out. Not only is this a letter for your committee, I also intend this letter to be a message to those within the Coast Guard that are still serving and asking what they can do to truly hold the Coast Guard accountable at every level and across the nation.

Background:

I retired at the rank of Commander on September 30, 2023 after serving more than 20 years of distinguished service in the U.S. Coast Guard. In my career, I was a highly decorated military officer serving at numerous high-profile assignments including Special Assistant to the Department of Homeland Security Deputy Secretary. I completed my career as a Senior Advisor for at the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). I was also recommended for accelerated promotion many times throughout my career. Admirals and Senior Service Executives often consulted my expertise directly on complex mission-related matters. In fact that was routine and typical, often by those who were never in my actual chain of command. The highest levels of the Coast Guard and even the Department of Homeland Security valued my intellect and expertise across a wide-range of areas including cybersecurity, immigration, large-scale disaster response, R&D, engineering, humanitarian operations, human resources, and even culture building. This all drastically changed when I reported to the Coast Guard Academy as a permanent professor in 2014.

Ongoing Timeline:

To put this letter into context, it's been 9 years, 2 months, 8 days (or 3,356 days) since I first elevated concerns of bullying and harassment to the Coast Guard Academy chain of command. In the time since, between 2014 and 2023, I was repeatedly harassed, bullied, intimidated, and retaliated against. A clear and deleterious pattern emerged after I filed complaints. I was retaliated against relentlessly and the Coast Guard abused its power to further escalate the bullying and harassment against me. Not only did

I speak out the abuse I endured, but I also spoke out about the rape, sexual assault, harassment, bullying, and culture of cover-ups at the Coast Guard Academy and across the fleet.

Mental Health:

As a Lieutenant (O-3), in desperation for my health and safety, summoned the courage to continue raising these deep concerns about the abuses I and others were experiencing. Already seen at an emergency facility for suicide ideation in June of 2016, I continued to detail to my superiors my ongoing years of abuses and fears of more unsustainable spiraling abuses by the top brass of the Coast Guard. (Those fears were realized with what I endured and also what was revealed by Operation Fouled Anchor in 2023.) My health had rapidly deteriorated after these escalating series of intimidating and many times public encounters by the top brass of the Coast Guard. This is cruelty and no member of the Coast Guard should ever be treated this way for not only rightfully reporting the allegations of abuse, but also for accurately detailing how the abusers are protected at all costs by the top brass of the Coast Guard. If it wasn't for a handful of other courageous witnesses and whistleblowers who supported me, because they saw the same illegal abuses, I would not be alive today.

Magnitude of Failure and Harm:

A total of 9 Admirals, 2 Senior Service Executives, and others including, the current and past two Commandants (Admiral Paul Zukunft, Admiral Karl Schultz, and Admiral Fagan) failed me. They failed me for not creating an environment congruent with existing policies and federal laws. They failed me for placing me in an explosive environment with known aggressors and perpetrators who made threats against me and harassed me on a daily basis. They failed me by not taking my allegations seriously. They failed me for not investigating my claims according to Coast Guard policy. They failed me when I was unlawfully retaliated against for speaking the truth then, *and what we all know the truth to be now*, that the culture within the Coast Guard is operating outside of its values, policies, and in many cases the law. These patterns of years and years of denial, gaslighting, and lack of accountability^{1,2} have been normalized. No amount of words in this letter can articulate the pain, psychological injuries, suffering and other harm directly caused by the Coast Guard through sham investigations, face-to-face interactions, townhalls, and emails.

Despite the Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General substantiating my claims in 2018, to this day, 5 years and 3 days (or 1,829 days) later, not a single Coast Guard employee, officer, or Admiral has ever been held accountable to include being court-martialed. In fact, I have never even in so much as received a formal written letter of apology. Instead, all perpetrators and the Admirals who covered up the internal investigative findings and condoned the misconduct (which are against Coast Guard policies), were all protected and rewarded. All have retired with full benefits, including Admiral Karl Schultz who obstructed Congress and even refused to appear in the 2019 Righting The Ship joint

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/products/112501> According to the Government Accountability Office, "Accountability requires that *information regarding the actions and decisions of the person or organization being held accountable must be transmitted*; this information must be *received and the necessary actions taken*; and the information must be used to improve performance, correct deficiencies, or *reward superior service*. Government must continue to develop ways of *increasing citizen involvement in the process of accountability*." [GAO Review, Vol. 15, Issue 2]

² **Coast Guard Discipline and Conduct Manual (COMDTINST M1600.2)** "Accountability. The Coast Guard must hold persons accountable for illegal discriminatory conduct and track those persons through the personnel records system. Laws and regulations prohibiting illegal discrimination may be enforced through administrative or disciplinary action under both military and civilian personnel systems...A violation of these provisions by military personnel is punishable under reference (a), Uniform Code of Military Justice, 10 U.S.C. § 801 – 946 (as amended)."

congressional hearing. When I testified exactly 4 years ago before Congress, I was further harassed and retaliated against because leaders in the Coast Guard were emboldened to do so.

Federal Law Violated:

10 U.S.C. § 1034 (“Military Whistleblower Protection Act”)

Coast Guard Polices Violated:

1. **Bullying.** Chapter 3 of the Discipline and Conduct Manual (COMDTINST M1600.2)
2. **Hostile Work Environment.** (Harassment, Intimidation, Violation of Privacy, Humiliation, Damage to Reputation). Civil Rights Manual (COMDTINST M5350.4)
3. **Discrimination.** Chapter 2 of the Discipline and Conduct Manual (COMDTINST M1600.2)
4. **Retaliation.** Chapter 2 of the Discipline and Conduct Manual (COMDTINST M1600.2), Civil Rights Manual (COMDTINST M5350.4), Military Whistleblower Retaliation Act (MWPA)
5. **Failure to Conduct Administrative Investigation.** Chapter 2 of the Discipline and Conduct Manual (COMDTINST M1600.2)
6. **Failure to Conduct Adequate EEO and Administrative Investigations.** Civil Rights Manual (COMDTINST M5350.4) and Administrative Investigations Manual (COMDTINST M5830.1A)

Whistleblowers and UCMJ Applicability:

According to the Congressional Research Service on protecting military whistleblowers,³ “Anyone subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) who violates military whistleblower protection can be prosecuted by court-martial with a maximum punishment that includes bad conduct discharge, dishonorable discharge, three years confinement, or total forfeiture of pay and allowances. Civilian employee violators are subject to administrative discipline that could include firing the employee.” Given the scope and magnitude of the misconduct of these Admirals, SESs, staff judge advocates, several O6s, O5s, and other senior federal civilians, these acts are punishable under various provisions. For military personnel, the Uniform Code of Military Justice, 10 U.S.C. § 801 – 946 (as amended), specifically violations of Coast Guard policy and federal law address:

Article 92. Prohibits disobeying orders and regulations and dereliction of duty.
Article 93. Prohibits cruelty and maltreatment of a person subject to another’s orders. This offense includes sexual harassment.
Article 134. Prohibits any conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline, including indecent language and acts. Any other degrading, humiliating, oppressive, etc., conduct could fall under this Article

³ Congressional Research Service, April 2020. Protecting Military Whistleblowers: 10 U.S.C. §1034 (congress.gov)

Status of Accountability:

None.

Righting the Ship:

I have also helped hundreds of victims and survivors, including those who were suicidal. Many of them, like myself, have served honorably yet will have to navigate post-traumatic stress and other deleterious health impacts for the rest of their lives. As underscored in an open letter to President Biden penned by five national advocacy groups, the Coast Guard is failing to live up to its values because they refuse to admit the pervasive toxic culture and they lack the integrity to hold perpetrators of policies and laws fully accountable. It must be made clear that a Coast Guard without integrity is one that is not accountable to its employees or the American people. No person is above the law. No agency is above the law. We urge you to use all Congressional authorities and coordinate with the House and other Senate committees, to hold the Coast Guard fully accountable.

The absence of justice is and will continue to be a permanent stain on the Coast Guard. The lack of full accountability sends an indefinite chilling message to any new recruit, current employee, and prospective servicemembers alike that the Coast Guard does not value the dignity of people and is incapable of Righting The Ship. Every day without justice is a failure to survivors, the American taxpayers, and anyone who has ever served.

Thank you for your attention.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized loop followed by a long horizontal stroke that tapers to the right.

Commander (ret.) Kimberly Young-McLear, Ph.D.
U.S. Coast Guard

Dec 6, 2023

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland
Security & Governmental Affairs
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Paul, Chairman Blumenthal and Ranking Member Johnson,
My name is Diane M. Bucci, a retired Command Master Chief of the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG).

I ask that this letter be made part of the hearing on Coast Guard Academy Whistleblowers:
Stories of Sexual Assault and Harassment.

From 1975 to 2002 I served in various positions including Officer in Charge of an afloat unit (the first enlisted woman to do so in 1988) and Officer in Charge of multi-unit ashore stations. I also served at USCG Headquarters as the Assistant Women's Policy Advisor (WPA) from 1992 to 1995.

Throughout my 27 year career, I was fortunate never to experience sexual assault, but I faced numerous instances of sexual harassment. One memorable incident occurred when my Group Commander, (O5) made inappropriate comments towards me in front of my peers and shipmates while patting his knee and suggesting we discuss my evaluations or make remarks about my breasts. Although I told him to stop, it affected how others perceived me and resulted in low marks on my evaluations regarding respecting others. When I appealed these evaluations and pointed out that he set the tone for such behavior, they were raised by one point; however, he faced no accountability as he eventually reached the O6 rank of Captain. Thankfully I only had to endure his presence for one year, but it was a year of hell.

In the early 1990's I was selected for assignment to the Women's Policy Advisor office. This office was established to review policies, recommend changes to assist in the retention of women and advise the Commandant on issues affecting women in the Coast Guard (CG). Even then the climate of the CG was not accepting to the WPA position. Part of my responsibilities involved monitoring a counseling hotline (commonly referred to as "1-800-dial a bitch"), available for all Coast Guard members seeking advice or support. It was disheartening to hear of the all hostile work environments our members endured. In cases where members wished to remain anonymous due to fear of retaliation, I utilized networking opportunities to arrange general unit visits aimed at educating members on Coast Guard Policy.

As a Command Master Chief in a Coast Guard District and later as the Command Master Chief of the Atlantic Area it deeply saddened me to witness senior officers failing to hold accountable those who attempted sexual assault or engaged in sexually harassment. Their belief that forcing

the perpetrator into retirement was punishment enough while victims carried a **"life sentence"** was unacceptable.

During my tour as a Command Master Chief in the 7th Coast Guard District (1999-2001) An O6 in charge of a Sector refused to hold accountable a junior officer in charge of a Coast Guard cutter who routinely sexually harassed his female Executive Officer and was accused of having an affair with a civilian, not his wife, while the ship was in drydock. When I spoke with the Sector Commander about it, he stated that an administrative investigation did not give enough evidence but added he "did not trust this officer." I questioned the O6 on why the CO was not being relieved for cause due to lack of confidence, his reply was not enough evidence (the O6's background was a lawyer and a former Commandant of Cadets at the CG Academy). When I spoke with the District Admiral his response was it was the commands discretion. This O6 retired as a flag officer and the ship's CO retired as an O5. I grew increasingly discouraged by the lack of accountability, pushing me towards retirement. It was my 18 year old daughter, who was struggling herself while serving in the US Air Force who said to me, " Mom, if you quit, who will be there to fight?" That statement compelled me to stay an additional 18 months until I had no more in me to fight.

In the spring of 2021 I witnessed Admiral Karl Schultz ,Coast Guard Commandant, testify to Congress without apologizing or expressing a commitment to holding members accountable moving forward. I had known the Admiral since he was a Lieutenant Commander and always considered him a good officer. I emailed Admiral Schultz about this matter but received no reply. In August of that same year I encountered Admiral Schultz personally and he acknowledged not replying to me because he knew he would see me and wanted to arrange a time to talk. He set aside some time and he invited Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Jason Vanderhaden (senior enlisted advisor to Admiral Schultz) to join us. During our meeting which lasted approximately one and a half hours we discussed the lack of accountability and its impact to retain women in the Coast Guard. I asked how these perpetrators are allowed to just retire particularly at their current rank when it was not held honorably. His reply was he never thought of it that way. I can not tell you the betrayal I now feel knowing that they were aware of but sitting on the "Fouled Anchor Report."

As I continue speaking with women still serving on active duty, they express experiencing silent retaliation since the release of the Fouled Anchor report. Some will choose to remain and fight with determination similar to mine. "I have every right to be here as you do; don't try forcing me out". Unfortunately, for many others, leaving the service becomes their only option while carrying that **life sentence**. In addition, there is a tremendous lack of trust of the senior leadership.

It is your responsibility to ensure that the United States Coast Guard holds those responsible accountable for their lack of actions which are within the statute of limitations.

Furthermore, I strongly believe that all future cases should be handled outside the jurisdiction of the USCG.

If an assault takes place off government property it should be referred to civilian authorities instead of being returned to the military for resolution. This approach will ensure that both the victim and the assailant receive a fair and impartial trial.

I implore you to hold the Coast Guard accountable not just for future incidents but also the past transgressions. This issue is not limited solely to the Coast Guard Academy; it pervades throughout the entire Coast Guard organization.



Diane M Bucci
Command Master Chief (Retired)
USCG

Copy: Senator Rick Scott

U.S. Senate
Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

05 Dec 2023

Subject: **Testimony of David C. Ely to the U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations**

Chairman Blumenthal,

As a retired Coast Guard Captain and 1982 graduate of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, I am appalled and angered at the leadership failures that allowed dozens of alleged sexual assault perpetrators at the Coast Guard Academy to go unprosecuted and not held accountable. I am further dismayed with senior leaders of the Coast Guard for not briefing Congress on the awful findings of *Operation Fouled Anchor* in a timely manner. A former Commandant of the Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen (May 2006 to May 2010) famously espoused “transparency breeds self-correcting behavior” – it seems that recent Coast Guard leadership failed to embrace this fundamental principle for the *Operation Fouled Anchor* report. A terrible shame.

I had the incredible pleasure of leading thousands of Coast Guard members throughout my 26-year Coast Guard career, including multiple afloat tours on Coast Guard cutters with 100+ members (both men and women). While I did not have any incidents of sexual assault during these tours (that I am aware of), I did have numerous incidents of inappropriate and prohibited sexual relationships between subordinate crewmembers (including between officers and enlisted members). In each and every one of these incidents, I endeavored to hold the senior member of the infraction more accountable for their actions. The power, authority, and control that senior members hold over the more junior members cannot be understated or dismissed.

The Coast Guard’s leadership failures -- at the highest levels -- to hold individuals accountable for sexual assault as documented in the 31 January 2020 final report on *Operation Fouled Anchor* is unacceptable. Senior officers were allowed to literally skate and their careers thrived, while the junior members who suffered the sexual assaults have endured years of trauma. This must not be allowed to continue.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,



David C. Ely, USCG Captain (retired)
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