

S. Hrg. 118-434

COAST GUARD WHISTLEBLOWERS: SEXUAL ASSAULT AND HARASSMENT

FIELD HEARING

BEFORE THE

PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS
OF THE

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

SECOND SESSION

AUGUST 8, 2024

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

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Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs



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COAST GUARD WHISTLEBLOWERS: SEXUAL ASSAULT AND HARASSMENT

THURSDAY, AUGUST 8, 2024

U.S. SENATE,
PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS,
OF THE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS,
New London, CT.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:08 a.m., in Evans Hall at Connecticut College, 270 Mohegan Avenue Parkway, New London, Connecticut, Hon. Richard Blumenthal, Chair of the Subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senator Blumenthal [presiding].

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR BLUMENTHAL¹

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you for being here. I am honored to welcome all of you to this hearing of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigation (PSI). As you know, we are a Subcommittee of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (HSGAC). This field hearing will be conducted according to the procedures that we normally use in Washington, DC, but as you can see, it has all the infrastructure, and we will be following the procedures of a normal Committee hearing.

I am going to make some opening statements, then I will introduce the witnesses, swear them in. We will give them an opportunity to have whatever time they would like to use for opening statement and then proceed to questioning.

Let me just say by way of introduction how grateful I am to Connecticut College for giving us this great venue, and to all of the folks in the audience who have come to—many of you may be U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) retirees or even in active duty, and I want to thank you for your service, as well as the witnesses who are with us today, retired or currently serving.

We are in New London, obviously, which has a special affinity and ties to the Coast Guard. All of us in Connecticut have a tremendous respect, admiration, even reverence, and affection for the Coast Guard because we are home to the Coast Guard Academy, and we will soon be home to the new Coast Guard Museum. We are really looking forward to that museum being here in Connecticut to celebrate the tremendous contribution over centuries to our nation by the Coast Guard.

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

Every day thousands of men and women put on the Coast Guard uniform, today being one of them, and serve and sacrifice for our Nation. They protect our Nation, and provide a contribution to our national defense and our criminal justice system that is invaluable, it's beyond words, an asset to this great nation.

But at the same time, many of them are survivors or will become survivors of sexual assault and harassment. We are honored to have witness today, five, survived of sexual assault and harassment. We issued a report yesterday with dramatic moving accounts of the stories from more than 80 whistleblowers about their experiences in the Coast Guard as survivors, and the discouraging shaming messages that were sent to them about coming forward, the retribution that they encountered, and the lasting ramifications to their lives.

Nearly a year ago, this Subcommittee opened a bipartisan inquiry into the Coast Guard's mishandling of sexual assault and harassment cases at Coast Guard Academy, and its subsequent failure to disclose its investigation of those cases to the Congress. Operation Fouled Anchor (OFA) was the name of that investigation, and it began as an investigation 2014 to cover a period of the 1990s to 2006. But that investigation was itself covered up. It was completed in 2020. It was disclosed in 2023 only because of a news report that found it and revealed it to the public.

Operation Fouled Anchor and its cover-up revealed a deep moral rot within the Coast Guard's ranks, and an utter abandonment of the honor, respect, and devotion to duty that comprise the Coast Guard's core values. This Subcommittee's investigation has revealed an even deeper decay. The scourge of sexual assault and harassment is not a past problem. It's not limited to the academy. It is persistent and pervasive, affecting not only the Coast Guard Academy, but also the ranks of active-duty personnel around the globe.

The culture of cover-up that hid Operation Fouled Anchor continues to this day, and that's the reason that we are here so that the Coast Guard will in fact change course in the right direction and lead by example, not only itself, but potentially other military services where sexual assault and harassment continues as a problem as well.

This Subcommittee launched its investigation seeking evidence about Operation Fouled Anchor, but right after we began, we heard from a legion of whistleblowers, past and present, men and women from across the Coast Guard, cadets, officers, and enlisted, with service spanning more than five decades.

Yesterday, the report that we issued, and I am going to make it a part of this record¹ and formally open the hearing, because we wanted to elevate statements from those individuals who bravely came forward to share their experiences with this Subcommittee.

In the words of just one of those individuals, "I never came forward to report my assaults. I knew I would not be taken seriously, and I saw how women who did come forward were treated. They would be blamed for causing their assault, punished for consuming alcohol or other infractions that paled in comparison to the crimes

¹ The report appears in the Appendix on page 65.

committed against them, or victims would not be believed that they were assaulted in the first place.”

There’s another individual who reported sexual assault who put it, and again, I quote, “During the investigation, they found that this was a pattern of behavior for him. Even at previous units, he had never been held accountable ever. It was sickening and humiliating. It was a slap in the face of all victims.”

The experiences relayed in this report underscore what this investigation has already made abundantly clear the problem of sexual assault and harassment in the Coast Guard is still far too pervasive. It is persistent and ongoing, and it affects officers and enlisted in present service. In fact, well over half of the whistleblowers who shared their experiences with this Subcommittee, described instances of sexual assault or harassment that occurred while serving on recent active duty.

As I told Admiral Fagan, Commandant of the Coast Guard, when she appeared before the Subcommittee earlier this summer, these survivors have shown that the Coast Guard’s failings did not just exist in the past. They are happening right now, and the Coast Guard must be addressed.

Today, we will hear from five of these brave individuals, all of whom enlisted in the Coast Guard. On behalf of myself and all of my colleagues, I want to thank each of you for being here today. I want to thank you for your courage, and tenacity, and coming forward. I also want to share the words of another member who could not be with us today, Lieutenant Commander Samantha Block. She reported sexual harassment during her second tour years ago. She thought the individual she reported had retired then, but earlier this year, she learned that that was not the case.

She told the Subcommittee, “I found out that he went onto another unit and continued his behavior. That has been the worst part of this whole ordeal from me to cope with because I did what I was supposed to do. I made the report, I raised the alarm, and it wasn’t enough.”

The Coast Guard, like the Academy, fostered an environment that seemingly from the top-down not only enable sexual assault harassment to persist, but also fuel the culture that has discouraged survivors from reporting, and fail to treat those survivors with seriousness and respect they deserve.

I want to say I was encouraged that the Coast Guard has announced a safe-to-report policy earlier this year, responding to the problems that have been disclosed by this investigation and others. I also understand that Admiral Fagan has directed that the Coast Guard take 33 actions after the completion of the accountability and transparency review initiated earlier this year and last year.

I do not need to tell anybody here that talk about reform is not enough. The service from the top-down, must ensure that everyone who serves follows these express commitments. I am also concerned that the Coast Guard has been late and lagging in making disclosures to this Committee. We have received additional documents production, but it has been long after we made requests, and then only because we made the possibility of compulsory process very real and direct to the Coast Guard.

Again, I want to be clear, I have enormous respect and admiration for the Coast Guard and all who serve in its ranks. I recognize all the service that they have done for this country. I am going to continue to be a strong supporter of the Coast Guard as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee as well as the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.

I am going to support the brave individuals who come forward to serve in the Coast Guard. But the strongest supporters of the Coast Guard also have to be the biggest advocates for change to rid the scourge of sexual misconduct and the culture of concealment that imperil it now, and in the future.

With that, I would like to introduce the witnesses that we're honored to have today. Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) Shawna Christine Ward, the United States Coast Guard, retired. Chief Warrant Officer Ward served in the Coast Guard for 24 years before retiring in 2018. Today, Chief Warrant Officer Ward will share her experiences of sexual harassment and assault during her service.

Yeoman Petty Officer First Class Crystal Van Den Heuvel. She has been a recruiter for the Coast Guard since 2022, and she will share with the Subcommittee her experience of retaliation after reporting sexual harassment by a fellow recruiter.

Lieutenant Commander Tina Owen. Lieutenant Commander Owen served in the Coast Guard from 1994 to 2017. She will describe her experiences of sexual assault and harassment, plus the lack of support that she received while in the Coast Guard.

Ms. Megan Lori Klement, a former Coast Guard Seaman. She served in the Coast Guard from 2012 to 2015. She will relay her experience of sexual assault harassment by a supervisor, as well as how the Coast Guard mishandled her report of this incident.

Chief Warrant Officer 4, Julian Bell, United States Coast Guard. Chief Warrant Officer Bell has served the Coast Guard since enlisting in 2003. He will share his experience also of sexual assault.

Again, my thanks to each of you for attending. Now as is our practice in the Committee, I am going to ask you to stand and take the oath. Do you solemnly swear that you will provide this Committee the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you, God?

Ms. WARD. I do.

Petty Officer VAN DEN HEUVEL. I do.

Ms. OWEN. I do.

Ms. KLEMENT. I do.

Warrant Officer BELL. I do.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. I am going to address you as Ms. or Mr. just for the sake of simplicity, without any disrespect to your rank, current or past. Why don't we begin with you, Ms. Ward?

TESTIMONY OF SHAWNA CHRISTINE WARD,¹ CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 4 (RETIRED), UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Ms. WARD. Thank you.

I want to thank this Committee for allowing our voices to be heard and for your continuous efforts to uncover the true culture

¹ The prepared statement of Ms. Ward appears in the Appendix on page 38.

of the Coast Guard. The culture has saturated the entire Coast Guard fleet starting as early as bootcamp, and continuing throughout a career. These incidents are not immune to rank or rates, as mine occurred, as the most junior enlisted, and continued to the most senior rank I could achieve as a chief warrant officer 4.

Unfortunately, I am one of many who experienced sexual assaults. Like others, my experience also involved harassment as well as a hostile workplace. In my written testimony, I provided several stories of sexual misconduct I experienced throughout my career, which speaks to the culture that has been deemed acceptable for so long. A tiny glimpse into this culture is having a paper thrown across the table at you while a male in position of authority is saying "effing women" in the "effing Coast Guard".

A male supervisor of mine said, "This is not fair, but this is the way it is." As a female in the Coast Guard, you will always be under a microscope. My two assaults went unreported. Why? This culture condoned it, and the lack of action from leaders allowed it since I was led to believe I would be punished for what happened to me.

Throughout my years of service, it always sounded like a broken record. The Coast Guard continued to play year over year after year, time after time. They always said they were changing their culture. However, lack of action from the Coast Guard spoke louder than their own words, not holding personnel accountable for their actions and often promoting these personnel with a high-ranking position to continue to spread this culture seemed to be the theme. The Coast Guard through their lack of actions condones this culture.

There are unspoken rules among groups of officers and enlisted that look out after their own at all costs. Admirals look out after themselves and do not step out of line within this group. Like the admirals, captains adhere to this unspoken rule and they too look out after their own. On the enlisted side, the chiefs' mess, E-7 to E-10 looks out after their own. As someone who was part of the chiefs' mess, I too know about these unspoken that occurs.

While there are some good personnel within these groups, there are only a few willing to go against their own group to better the Coast Guard. This is a significant reason there is a lack of accountability and transparency for the sexual misconduct that occurs.

In January, 1974, the first group of enlisted females called "regulars" reported to bootcamp. During this time, the Coast Guard could have worked on their culture, but they made the decision not to make their culture a priority. When I joined in 1994, 20 years later, this culture was still running rampant. Again, the Coast Guard could have made this culture a priority. Yet, again, they made the decision not to.

Although it's been over 50 years since "regulars" arrived to bootcamp, females have been a part of this organization since 1830. When will the Coast Guard make changing their culture a true priority? I still love the Coast Guard, but I am heartbroken. They had 24 years throughout my career to fix their culture. During this time, I frequently put the Coast Guard ahead of my own family and missed precious moments with my children because I cherish the Coast Guard and really believed the culture would change.

Today, I look back and I wonder if it was all for nothing because the Coast Guard never made change in their culture a true priority. The Coast Guard's lack of actions and accountability speak loud and clear. This culture is acceptable. In the end, I am left to wonder how many more generations of females and males must go through similar experiences before the Coast Guard makes its culture a priority and truly take significant action across all ranks, high and low, to fix it. I am also left to wonder when the Coast Guard will stop covering and making excuses for those and continuing the culture while pushing brave souls seeking to fix it.

Unfortunately, it seems this just may be too big of a feat for the Coast Guard and something I will never see in my lifetime. I have had to find peace with my decisions for not speaking up when I should have during my career. I have endured years of counseling and mental health programs to work through my traumatic experiences and still continue to deal with the aftermath from incidents that occurred decades ago.

With all the odds against me, I am very fortunate I have had a successful career. Unfortunately, not everyone is able to stay the same. I can only hope sharing my experiences help make the Coast Guard a better place than when I left and prevent others from enduring similar experiences.

While the Coast Guard should be a place to thrive for a lot of females and males, the Coast Guard is a place to survive. Through your actions, Congress must speak loud and clear to the Coast Guard; this culture will no longer be condoned.

Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you very much. Ms. Van Den Heuvel.

TESTIMONY OF CRYSTAL VAN DEN HEUVEL,¹ YEOMAN PETTY OFFICER FIRST CLASS, UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Petty Officer VAN DEN HEUVEL. Hello, Senator. My name is Petty Officer First Class Crystal Van Den Heuvel. Thank you for inviting me to testify about the Coast Guard's mishandling of my sexual harassment report.

At the time of the incident, my last name was Island, and I was assigned to the Coast Guard Recruiting Office, Hampton Roads, Virginia. I was sexually harassed by aviation maintenance technician first class, Matthew Williams, while we were traveling to and from and during recruiter orientation training at Training Center Cape May, New Jersey from 28th November, until December 2, 2022.

While driving to Cape May and during training, Williams divulged to me that he gets aroused by a woman urinating, made numerous statements about listening to me urinate through the walls of my bathroom, and asked me why I turned the water on when I used the restroom. While traveling back to our duty station, William stated he contemplated stealing my underwear from my suitcase while he was in my room with my roommate and I was out to dinner with a friend.

¹The prepared statement of Ms. Van Den Heuvel appears in the Appendix on page 44.

He then began attempting to steal them over several hours from my suitcase that was in the backseat of my car. He stated he would have given them back. He just wanted to smell them. I replied that he is married, and if he wanted to smell somebody's underwear, he should smell his wife's. He did not stop, and I threaten to kick him out of my car, and stated he would have to call his wife to come get him. Minutes after he returned home, he sent me a picture of him smelling his wife's underwear with a text saying, "As requested."

There were numerous mishandlings of my case. Captain Richard Tipton, my commanding officer (CO) at the time, failed to initiate an anti-hate and harassment investigation. He failed to notify the Civil Rights Director, Civil Rights Service Provider in Coast Guard Investigation Services (CGIS). He also failed to appoint an investigating officer who has completed Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Coast Guard training in investigating allegations of harassing behaviors.

When I filed an Article 138 to report Tipton's wrongdoing through Admiral Russell Dash, the admiral responded by refusing to take action on my Article 138, unless I withdrew my civil rights complaint. Lieutenant Victor Almodovar told details of my report to my coworkers and gave them permission to discuss the open investigation. Chief Warrant Officer Brandon Ingram conducted an investigation he was not qualified to do, asked victim-blaming questions, and stated Williams was remorseful.

Now retired Chief Walter Morrie, Petty Officer Ellen Audrey Davis, and Stephanie Figueroa, pretended to support me in my report, but made numerous victim-blaming statements to others, including saying I was just attempting to raise my U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability. They wondered what my actions were that caused Williams to behave the way he did, and alluded to previous sexual assaults I experienced, stating I was a problem. Chief Andrew Livingston put in my evaluations that I caused my own sexual harassment.

None of these members have been held accountable for their actions. Instead, Chief Morrie was allowed to retire honorably. Figueroa was advanced to E-6, and Chief Livingston was actually given a permanent recruiter-in-charge position at Coast Guard Recruiting Office, San Antonio, Texas.

On January 25, 2023, I was brought into a meeting where I believed I would be getting the result of my sexual harassment investigation. However, I was instead relieved from my special duty position as a recruiter, given negative paperwork, and my recommendation of advancement was removed. I was told it was because Tipton believed I was complicit in the conduct of Williams and because of videos I posted on TikTok.

However, days before the investigation started, I received a positive endorsement from Tipton on advancement to chief 1 officer. Tipton also stated in writing, he looked into my social media use in response to the sexual harassment investigation. However, before I made my report, Tipton endorsed my TikTok video publicly while visiting other recruiting offices, and on a call he made directly to me after I enlisted my first person into the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard mishandling of sexual harassment came to light

during the investigation into Operational Fouled Anchor. This investigation uncovered numerous cover-ups regarding sexual assault and harassment at the Coast Guard Academy.

Before I end my testimony, I want to point out these members that assaulted and harassed others and were protected are still in the Coast Guard today. These are the flag officers and commanding officers we are supposed to trust to make decisions regarding our reports. I want to condemn those that continue the culture that allows assault and harassments to take place.

Admiral Russell Dash, Captain Richard Tipton, Lieutenant Victor Almodovar, Chief Warrant Officer Brandon Ingram, retired Chief Walter Morrie, and Chief Andrew Livingston, Petty Officer Allen Audrey Davis, and Petty Officer Stephanie Figueroa. Those nine members and those like them are the reasons members like Petty Officer Matthew Williams felt comfortable sexually harassing me, and the reason numerous members refuse to make reports of sexual assault and harassment.

I respectfully request to not only demand change for the future of the Coast Guard, but to demand that previous victims get the justice they deserve.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you very much. Ms. Owen.

**TESTIMONY OF TINA OWEN,¹ LIEUTENANT COMMANDER
(RETIRED) UNITED STATES COAST GUARD**

Ms. OWEN. Good morning. Thank you, Senator Blumenthal, and other distinguished guest. Thank you for this opportunity today to be before you.

Recalling and reliving these events is difficult at any stage of trauma recovery. It pains me that seven years into my retirement, I am before the Senate telling my story that started 30 years ago. After serving 22 years on active duty with the Coast Guard, my testimony will give only brief recollections of mine and others' traumas. It is my hope that I and this panel will be the last to publicly be retraumatized from our time in the Coast Guard. A Coast Guard we all still love and bleed blue for. We all stand united; Academy cadets, enlisted, officers, and retirees. We want to make our Coast Guard the best it can be.

I am Tina Owen, and this is our story. My first assault occurred in the X-ray room by the health service (HS) technician first class who eventually was caught after taking over 100 inappropriate X-rays and was sent to the brig. I learned of his whereabouts after having what I thought was an allergic reaction to the dyes in that same exact X-ray room as a health service tech technician third class, three years later. I was just told, "Get over it. He's in the brig."

You see, I did not want to be in the medical field. I wanted to drive the boats, but at my first duty station, I was told that women were not going to drive the boats in this Coast Guard. Becoming an HS was a blessing in disguise as I was always in a position to allow people to have a safe space to talk to, confide in someone, to know they were being heard even though they could not tell anyone else.

¹ The prepared statement of Ms. Owen appears in the Appendix on page 51.

When I was named enlisted person of the year for the Fifth District, I was also endorsed for office to attend officer candidate school. I thought for sure I could make a difference as an officer. Inducted as one of the first five women that formed the Coast Guard Women's Leadership groups, this is where I realized there was not much of a cultural difference between enlisted and officers. Survival mode is what I went into.

After leaving headquarters in the original Women's Leadership Group, I had informal women's leadership groups for the duration of my 22 years. You were all heard. All of the women and men that confided in me as a health service technician, clinic administrator, work life supervisor, or just a shipmate, you were heard loud and clear. I am grateful to have been that safe space for you-all.

Senator, I am here to tell you; they were raped, they were harassed, they had inappropriate electrocardiogram (EKGs) taking of them, they were kicked, they had things thrown at them from across the room. These said objects hit them in the head. They were made of public mockery. They found hidden cameras in the bathroom. They discovered a drunk shipmate crawling in their rack on the cutter. They all just wanted to serve their Coast Guard in a safe space, but they were violated.

I will leave you with one last incident that occurred while I was on terminal leave prior to retiring, on my front porch. I sat as the chief warrant officer read me my rights and advised me that I was under investigation for an inappropriate relationship with the civil rights officer who was a chief.

The investigation found him guilty of making false statements about me and four other women on the base. False statements to his supervisor that he was meeting us ladies and he had a relationship with us, of which we did not. He was afforded the opportunity to either get stationed in Alaska or retire. Thankfully, he retired. But when asked for him to be charged with sexual harassment, I was advised it didn't meet the criteria.

Today, I want us all to release these pains and ask the Senate to take this matter to a safe place and allow victims to see actions versus words. I have received several different treatments with the Veterans Administration Hospital and private practices, and have more holistic approaches to this healing of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Please help the Coast Guard and all branches of the service become a safe place to serve our country. The VA estimates 22 veterans commit suicide each day. I am over my time, but I would like to ask if we could just take one moment of silence for all of our comrades that have fallen before us.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Without objection.

Ms. OWEN. Thank you, Senator.

[The Subcommittee observed a moment of silence.]

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you very much. Ms. Klement.

**TESTIMONY OF MEGHAN LORI KLEMENT,¹ FORMER SEAMAN,
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD**

Ms. KLEMENT. Good morning, Senator Blumenthal, and Ranking Committee Members. I am really grateful to be here today. My name is Megan Klement, and I served in the Coast Guard from 2012 to 2015. I am a military sexual trauma survivor, and I stand here as an advocate for my younger version of myself and every enlisted member who needs to be heard.

Have you ever had a nightmare where you are in a crowd of people and someone is after you, but you cannot scream or run? That is what it felt like for me serving in the Coast Guard after my assaults. I was a 19-year-old girl who never left home before I joined. My first unit was an isolated small boat station that robbed me of all the confidence I left bootcamp with.

By the time I arrived at Air Station Port Angeles, I wanted to be seen as a good worker. I met the man who would continue to assault me and harass me over the course of the next four months, my second day there also days after I married my husband.

He was more than twice my age and a retired senior chief contracted to the base. He was a very well-liked man by the command, and I am grateful for machinery technician (MK2) Kool who recognized what this man was doing, and he went forward and reported it in hopes our leadership would do the right thing.

My cries and pleas to be seen and heard did not fall upon deaf ears, but weak leaders. Leaders who failed me on every level. My assaults became a stain on their careers, but what they failed to see is their response is the stain. From my first class who did not advocate for me, my chief warrant officer who tried to intimidate me. They were weak. My command master chief and my executive officer who told me to keep my mouth shut in fear it would ruin my reputation and follow me around when in reality they were worried about themselves because they are weak.

My CGI agents who revictimize me by making me touch myself, they were weak. The D-13 master chief who told his colleagues I was only upset over an unwanted hug, discrediting my months of assaults, and then telling me I wasn't actually assaulted. He was weak too. In true Coast Guard fashion, what did they do? They made him the master chief petty officer of the entire Coast Guard.

What happens under weak leaders? Failure. The Coast Guard failed people before me and they have continued to fail people after me. The teachings of the academy have poisoned the entire fleet. It is extremely naive to believe that this is a problem of the past. The officers who were cadets during Operation Fouled Anchor are now our leaders.

When I got asked to film my assault story for the Storytellers' Project, I was hopeful that that meant that the Coast Guard had made strides to be better, that there had been progress made since I would be discharged in 2015. It was devastating to find out that the Coast Guard had still thought it was a good idea to silence our stories, but I knew that I was called back for a purpose and that purpose was to continue to fight for the ones who do not have a voice.

¹ The prepared statement of Ms. Klement appears in the Appendix on page 54.

I released my video on my own accord, and since, over 50 survivors have reached out to me, some prior enlisted, some active duty. I have spent countless hours helping and advocating for them. I have received messages that say, "I need help. I am desperate. I have no one to turn to." I knew that I needed to continue to fight for change because so many of these active-duty members are in the same situation I was in a decade ago; left in the desert watching the last plane take off. I will not let the Coast Guard tell the public that this is a thing of the past when so many of your members are fighting for justice and accountability right now.

If I had not released my video and inquired about my documents, I would have never known that I never received a 6095, something I would need for VA benefits. I would not have been contacted by multiple women who had been assaulted by my same perpetrator. I would not have learned that I, in fact, was not the first person to report him to my command. That command repeatedly allowed his behavior to slide, and in turn, left me to get assaulted by him. I want to see this through. I want to feel the pride for the Coast Guard again. I want to see them be better.

My sons are so proud of their mother for serving her country, but what they do not understand yet is that their mother's service was spent surviving and fighting for accountability. When I was 20 years old and still in the Coast Guard, I got pregnant with my son, and when I was pregnant, I was still wearing a label as a bad worker, as a liar, and someone who made a fuss over an unwanted hug. I was under so much stress wearing a label I did not deserve.

It was with in my seventh month of pregnancy that I found out I had internal damage. I had to return to work and absolutely no one knew the news I had found out. All the pain I felt physically was my body's reaction to my assaults, to not feeling safe. I gave birth to my son, and I wept when I had to return to work knowing that I was going to have to return to an unsafe work environment. I remember holding my son in my arms that morning, and I decided that I would continue to advocate, and stand up, and I would become someone he was proud of.

To everyone in a leadership position, I guarantee you that none of the leaders who failed me thought I would be standing here today. I was not quiet then, and I won't be quiet now. The next time you try to silence a survivor, remember me that you could, they could be exposing what you did a decade later. Make decisions that you will be proud of 10 years from now. Make the right choice and advocate for the ones who need it.

The Coast Guard is filled with phenomenal people, some of whom I consider family, and I would not be here today if MK2 Kool had not recognized what happened to me or Chief Prysock who taught me how to protect myself. The chief who stood up for me in the mess and the captain who fought for me, this is how I honor these great people fighting for what is right.

What has happened to me has happened to so many others. I am not unique, I am not special. I am one of many. I will continue to stand up for these members, and I will continue to help find ways to make the Coast Guard a safer place and I highly recommend that you look into the Durio Act, Senator Blumenthal,

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you very much, Ms. Klement. Mr. Bell.

**TESTIMONY OF JULIAN BELL,¹ CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 4,
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD**

Chief BELL. Good morning, Senator. Thank you, again, for having us. It is an honor, and I am deeply grateful to be here.

My name is Chief Warrant Officer Julian Bell, and I stand before you today as a survivor of military sexual assault. I enlisted in the Coast Guard in July 2003 and I have proudly served for over 21 years. My journey began with excitement and purpose as I reported to my first assignment for the Coast Guard Cutter Chase, its Homeport in San Diego, California.

At just 19 years old, I was eager and ready to serve my country. However, the reality of life onboard was starkly different from what I had expected from day one. I witnessed a toxic environment where shipmates who struggled with mental health, or performance, or subjected to harassment and hazing. The prevailing command climate discouraged any cries for help leading to open ridicule and persecution instead. Violence, inappropriate relationships, and assault became the unsettling norms amongst my shipmates.

In 2004, during a harrowing incident in the Navy barracks, I was drugged and raped by a fellow Coast Guard shipmate and two navy sailors. After that traumatic experience, I felt isolated and alone. I worked directly with the person who assaulted me, but felt that speaking up would only lead to further ostracization. Thus, I chose silence, leaving it was my only option.

Despite the trauma, I pressed on in my career. By 2016, I had reached the rank of chief warrant officer and was assigned to Sector Houston-Galveston. It was at this time I encountered a pivotal moment in my life. As part of my leadership training at the Coast Guard Academy, I attended an 8-hour seminar on sexual assault prevention and response.

It was during this training that I met Shannon Norberg, who's here today, the Academy's sexual assault response coordinator. With her guidance, I finally found the courage to come forward and report my assault even though 12 years had passed since that dreadful day. Confronting my past was not easy, the memories resurfaced and the pain returned. I submitted to an investigation by CGIS hoping for justice.

However, the outcome was disheartening. My assailant was believed, and little hope was offered for accountability. After several agonizing months, the investigation was closed. To make matters worse, the trauma for my assault manifested serious physical health issues, including cancer in my pelvis. Thankfully, I was able to find medical care and recover, but by then, my physical and mental well-being were a complete disarray.

In early 2022, I reached a significant milestone in my healing journey by publicly sharing my story through my personal podcast, Sailors Disgrace, providing a space for others to voice their experiences, share resources, and gain insight into the life of military members managing the trauma and aftermath of sexual assault.

¹ The prepared statement of Mr. Bell appears in the Appendix on page 61.

Each shared story has been cathartic for me, and it has empowered fellow survivors to navigate their own healing paths. However, during the summer of 2023, when cable news network (CNN) released their report of Operation Fouled Anchor detailing the shameful history of sexual assault and harassment at the Coast Guard Academy, I was both saddened and motivated.

Rather than feeling defeated, I felt emboldened to take action to fight against the culture of cover-up that was taught at the Academy. I became a sexual assault victim advocate, eager to effect change. I also shared my story with senior officials in the Coast Guard at the Executive Summit in February of this year, and attendees including Admiral Fagan, expressed that my account would trigger necessary change.

Yet, soon after, I faced another setback during the training videos that I recorded, along with Meghan Klement for Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month, concerns arose about the release. The fear of tarnishing the Coast Guard's image halted the release of my story and those of my fellow survivors. We had hoped our voices would be heard, but instead, we felt our experiences were being silenced.

Additionally, I was in the midst of a second investigation to my case, which had been reopened due to efforts from CGIS leadership. However, I soon discovered troubling issues, including missing evidence. From my initial interviews leading to doubt about the thoroughness of the investigation. I was left feeling as if my quest for justice was being undermined yet again. Ultimately, no administrative or criminal action was taken against my assailant, who was allowed to retire shortly after reclosing the investigation.

To further exacerbate the hopelessness of my case, CGIS just contacted me weeks afterwards investigating an unrelated hazing incident during my time on the Chase, nearly 20 years before. It was obvious that their intent was to implicate me in something that would bring discredit to my name and my story.

With each step, it became clear that our systems were broken. While I have served honorably for over two decades and loved the Coast Guard, I have witnessed firsthand the failures within our systems to protect and support those in vulnerable positions. Now, we must ensure that when our members call for help, they receive compassionate and honest responses that prioritize their healing.

The stories of a survivor like myself are far too common, as we hear today, and we have a responsibility to change that narrative. We must create an environment rooted in care and transparency where survivors are encouraged to speak up and their stories lead to meaningful action. We need to transform our culture and to one that respects, supports, and empowers those who have faced unimaginable traumas.

It's time for us to stop silencing survivors. We must learn from their experiences and honor their strength. We have let down our brothers and sisters for far too long, but now is the time for action. Together, we can pave the way for a brighter and safer future within our ranks.

Thank you, and I look forward to your question, Senator.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. Let me say, again, as I said to you when we met privately before we came out here, how proud

we are of you for coming forward. How proud your families, your children, each of you who has children, should be for your courage and strength and being with us today. I have read your testimony a couple of times, each of your testimony, and I have to tell you, hearing your stories, your faces and voices just has enormous impact on me, and I hope it will on the Coast Guard and on our Nation.

One of the themes that I think cuts across all your testimony is the difficulty in reporting, and even the discouraging and shaming of reporting that occurred, which itself incurred is an emboldens the assaulters and the perpetrator.

I would like to begin with some questions around the reporting issue to you, Ms. Klement, you noted in your opening statements that at various points in your career, you had specific individuals who looked out for you and stood up for you. How did the support from those individuals enable you to ultimately report what happened?

Ms. KLEMENT. It's a good question, Senator. When I realized that I had somebody who held some sort of rank and position standing behind me, that is when I became really brave. It was really amazing when I realized I came somewhere where there was people that were going to advocate for me. Then I knew that if I had just a few people who held some sort of rank standing behind me, that I could push it as far as I could. There's a lot of power in that.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Now, one of your superiors told you to, "Think about the life and career of the men who were harassing you." "Think about the life of and career," of the perpetrators. How did that affect you?

Ms. KLEMENT. Senator that often plays in my head. I was a young girl, and I was really scared, and I was afraid to come forward. When he called me out back behind the building, he took me around the side where nobody could see us or hear us. I was hopeful that somebody was going to help me get out of the situation I was in. When he said those words to me, I lost all hope. I felt ashamed, and embarrassed, and I felt completely discredited. That has followed me around for 11 years now.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Let me pose the same kind of question to Ms. Ward and Mr. Bell. You both mentioned in your opening statement that you did not report the sexual assault or harassment that you encountered until years later, if at all. Can you elaborate on why you chose not to report then, and maybe whether you would have made the same decision again now?

Ms. WARD. When I went to bootcamp, it was kind of a blur, but I do not recall any sexual harassment, sexual assault training when I went through, being exposed to the acceptable comments that permanent party staff at Cape May allowed. Then showing up at my very first duty station and being told when I am being picked up at the airport, that I am replacing another female who slept with a married VM-2, which is completely illegal. They moved her up to—it was called a group back then, but it's considered a sector nowadays. They moved her, and I was replacing her.

The constant harassment I was receiving at the station and being in trouble for every little thing I did or did not do, kind of led to the whole, "If I say anything, I am going to get in trouble."

After my first assault at the unit, I did not even know who to talk to. I could not tell you what the reporting procedures were. I was not allowed to talk to anybody higher than my rank. I was just living under a microscope.

I could not talk to any guys at the unit because I was constantly told about inappropriate relationships with males. If I said hi to you, then I would be in trouble for an inappropriate relationship just for me talking to you.

Then, I go to my second station, and I received the same, if not worse, harassment against the crew. Then to find out that the commanding officer had his boys club, and he would constantly say how great these boys were, and he named them by name. Everybody at the unit knew who they were, and the boys were the ones that were causing all the issues and got away with everything, including my assault, and then assault on another coworker of mine who was male.

All of this just reiterates in your head, it's going to be your fault. Because I went drinking, I had alcohol, I was with the group. Both of them involved with alcohol. But I would have been blamed because I was drinking. I would have been blamed because I was in a room with somebody I worked with. It was my fault. But that is what was in my 19-, 20-year-old and 21-year-old brain. That no matter what you do from the minute you are picked up at bootcamp, this is what they just ingrain in you. Nothing will come out of my assault. And that's OK.

But to see this culture continue time and time again, everyone here having the exact same story. The Coast Guard's just saying it's OK. I am tired of the words. I am tired of the word commitment. There is no commitment. Words are not enough to fix it. Action actually has to be taken in order to do it. I probably did not even answer your question, but I hope it was clear. [Laughter.]

Senator BLUMENTHAL. It's a very good answer. Thank you. Mr. Bell.

Chief BELL. Yes, Senator. 20 years ago, it was very common to experience the culture that I experienced where open retribution was prevalent. From my first day on the ship out of bootcamp, I remember vividly a fellow junior member was in the process of being discharged for saying he was suicidal. While he was still on the ship and still working during this process, he was openly ridiculed in front of me on my first day on the ship and called horrible names, that I won't say here, in front of the entire crew. People laughed it off. This is someone that was really struggling with their personal issues. I received that message loud and clear, that if you were to speak up, you are going to turn out just like this guy.

That's just the very first incident, the first day. The year and a half I was on board, it was almost every day something like that was happening. I did not have a safe place to go. I could not trust my command. I could not trust my chiefs. I could not trust even the junior petty officers above me to take a report of anything. Something as serious as sexual assault. Certainly not. I could not complain about a toe.

There was nothing you could complain about without getting ridiculed. Hazing was prevalent every single day as well. It was just a very toxic environment. Also, at that time, we did not have

victim advocates. We did not have a Sexual Assault Prevention Response and Recovery (SER) Program. It was relatively non-existent. We did not have a mechanism in place either to make those reports to receive the care. I was really left in the dark.

Again, I want to highlight the fact that this is still prevalent even today. Yes, there are some great response resources that we have. Many people are afraid to use them because of retaliation, because of retribution, because of fear discrimination. That is the issue. The underlying issue of all this. There's no trust in our systems.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. Ms. Van Den Heuvel, you were relieved from your special duty position and given a non-recommendation for advancement and negative papers after you reported sexual harassment. In fact, the evaluation you received shortly after you reported states, I am quoting, "Member engaged in inappropriate conversations that left the impression to another member to engage in similar behaviors. This extremely unprofessional behavior ultimately led to sexual harassment."

Blaming the victim, in other words. Can you tell me about the impact of this evaluation and other actions on you and your career?

Petty Officer VAN DEN HEUVEL. Absolutely, Senator. The largest impact careerwise is I'm still a first class. If I would not have reported, I would've advanced to chief last year. That's probably the hardest hit I've taken. Advancing to chief, has been a goal since I joined the Coast Guard. And then, mentally I was diagnosed with PTSD following this, not even in response to the sexual harassment, but in response to commands actions. The commands actions have affected me more than the sexual harassment did.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I know these questions are very personal, and you know, I apologize that they are personal, but again they are extraordinarily important to people understanding what you have gone through and what others are going through.

Let me ask you, Ms. Van Den Heuvel, your written testimony mentions you received counseling on your work performance and your marital status shortly after you made your report, and that you felt you were being blamed. That you were being blamed for the harassment you experienced. Which factors led to that conclusion?

Petty Officer VAN DEN HEUVEL. I am really happy you asked about that. This is a common tactic that many commands use when members are struggling with anything. Depression reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault. They know that there's a written policy in our civil rights manual stating you cannot retaliate against members for engaging in protective activity, like reporting.

However, they will find things, little things that they can punish you for. Like in my written statement, I said that they changed my work schedule while I was ordered to be out of the office. I would have never known about the change. However, when I returned, they already had an opinion about my report and I was counseled that I just did not show up for work. However, anybody who's ever served in the military knows if I chose to just not show up for work, I would not be sitting here. I would be in the brig.

Then there was a second part—I cannot remember what the second part was in your question. Oh, my marital status. This is an-

other tech accused. Just like Ms. Ward said, with women, if we're not married and we have any type of relationship with our male coworkers, we are labeled words I cannot say, because I think this might be televised.

Perception is reality for the Coast Guard. They perceive that you are doing something inappropriate, then you are doing something inappropriate and you are at the mercy of your commanding officer to believe you or not believe you. My marital, I was going through a divorce at the time. It was two months before I was finalized, and my marital status was taken into question, and I was told I could not talk about any of my personal life at work, even though nobody else was told that I was the only person not married. There was one other person who was engaged, but he got married while I was there. I was the only person going through a divorce, and my marital status had nothing to do with my sexual harassment.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Let me ask. I know your report, I think it was made less than two years ago. This is a question I am going to ask all of you, but I will begin with you. Do you think your report would be treated differently today, differently from what you know of the Coast Guard today, treated differently than it would have been two years ago or in the past?

Petty Officer VAN DEN HEUVEL. I think my sexual harassment report would have been taken serious today, only because I am under a different command. My commanding officer, I know that the way he talks about sexual harassment prevention and sexual assault prevention, it is not the bullets that they are given to talk about it. He actually advocates. He was very supportive of me being here. I do think that it would be taken serious by him.

That's the issue with the Coast Guard. Is you are at the mercy of your commanding officer. If he does not take it serious, you were going to be retaliated against and nothing's going to happen with your report.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. If you are in a better command, it would be taken seriously. But if you were in that former, encountered the same of lack of seriousness and respect.

Petty Officer VAN DEN HEUVEL. Absolutely.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Let me ask others of you the same question.

Ms. KLEMENT. I have an answer for that, Senator. I have had multiple, a lot of survivors reach out to me with situations currently happening. I went through what they are going through. Like Chrissy said, they have tactics when you seek help. I had sought help for mental health, and so I was labeled as a problem. A lieutenant commander went through my medical record and found that I had flat feet. They actually tried kicking me out for fraudulent enlistment because they did not want to deal with the assault stuff.

That is a tactic they're still using. There's a couple girls I know that have come forward with assault. It's not necessarily handled, but then they will look at their work performance and find something to use. So, no, I don't think that it would have been different. But, again, I agree with Chrissy, that it really depends on your command and how much they value mental health and assault.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Ms. Ward, you served for an impressive number of years? How do you feel about change in culture? Is it enough? Would it have a meaningful effect on you reporting?

Ms. WARD. When I retired in 2018, the culture never changed. Just to be clear, the culture does not change, has not changed. I am sure it went way before I even came. I do not know if it would be any different if I knew back then how a report—I don't know if it would be any different today. That is super sad to say, because it's all who's in that leadership position. They have power over you, and it's how you are perceived. If they perceive you as a person who wants to try to fix something and say, "Hey, this is wrong," you get ousted.

I have seen time and time again. People get separated from the Coast Guard. I got sent away from my second duty station because I was experiencing such a horrible climate at the station. Not only with the sexual assault, but with the climate that I got called into the commanding officer's room. He wanted me to name names, and I refused to give him names because it was his boys club.

His comment to me was, "Didn't you want to go to group when the records were sent there? How about report tomorrow? Problem solved." That was my experience with trying to fix something that I saw that was wrong. I got sent away. I was the problem. The station was perfectly fine without me. Then it engraves in you that it must be you that is the problem.

When I hear stories today with everybody saying the exact same thing, we are the problem because we are trying to fix something that we see as broken. No, I do not think it's any different. Again, it's all who's in the leadership, and who's willing to do the right thing. Because we all know policy is written, and we have to follow policy, and it depends on how much people are willing to follow policy.

Ms. OWEN. Senator, if I may, I would like to just give a good news story.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. You have served a significant number of years before—

Ms. OWEN. 22 years. Yes, sir. The comment that was made to me when I thought I was having the allergic reaction was actually a panic attack. I saw that individual years later because I had at that point outranked him. I felt much more comfortable approaching him with the subject.

After I administered his service-wide exam, I called him to the side, and I just expressed to him what he said to me many years ago and how it affected me. Very calmly, not without accusatory effects, but I just needed him to know that his behavior then would not be tolerated now because I was in a position to stop those actions.

A few days later, I received an apology letter in the mail. I think sometimes if we could bring to the forefront some of these issues, again, having the right command and the right people with either a good background being raised by good people, or having just some good morals and ethics, I think some of this could be mitigated.

I am very fortunate to have been able to approach that individual and resolve some of those thoughts of maybe it was my fault

that this happened to me when, in fact, over 100 women got assaulted in that same very X-ray room.

I don't know that things would be different today. I have been retired for seven years. I can tell you, on the way out the door, the shade of blue did not look much better. I would throw caution to the wind if there's been a true impactful change over the last 50 years.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Ms. Klement referred to her younger self and you have just referred Ms. Ward to the position that you had later in your career as a lieutenant commander as opposed to an enlisted or new recruit. All of you are now in a position of greater power. At the time that you suffered sexual assault and harassment, you were powerless compared to the perpetrator and compared to the system.

Ms. KLEMENT. Yes.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. That's why creating a safe place for reporting is so very important because the mere power structure fully apart from what was said to you explicitly discouraging you from coming forward is a part of the problem.

The culture of covering up, failing to confront this problem is one that persists today because of that power structure and because of a lack of safe reporting system. Ms. Ward used the word action. Let me ask you on this panel, what you think is necessary to create that kind of safe reporting or safe culture that encourages whistleblowers and survivors like yourself coming forward?

Ms. WARD. I reported once, but that was for a hostile work environment. It was at an elite unit. The best of the best, I was told. My lieutenant commander just—I felt like I walked through a mirror in my entire career before then. I was a chief warrant officer, just a brand-new chief warrant officer. I had several years in before this. I felt like my entire career just went backwards. Everything I did that was correct up until this point, all of a sudden became wrong.

I got the courage to file against my lieutenant commander. The hardest thing I ever had to do in my career. To walk into a conference room because it was required, and see him in the middle of this one side of the table. He was in the middle. There's a half a dozen other people there from the unit. To tell me at that moment that because he never physically hit me, it cannot be considered a hostile workplace. At that moment, I knew the entire meeting was for nothing. My report was for nothing. I was told to play the game.

The action that is needed on this, honestly, is to publicly name these people and not continue to hide. The people that are doing it. There is no other way. We have heard words and we have seen policy come out. We have heard the words, I am committed, I am committed, I am committed. But what action has actually been taken? Not a thing.

It's holding everybody equally responsible in all levels of the command. It starts at the commandant and works all the way down to the bottom. When it is noticed that somebody did not follow proper procedure for how to do a report, well then you need to hold that person accountable.

If the command did something wrong, then they need to be held accountable. But it's equally across the board, not one command holding one person responsible, but on the other side of the coast, somebody does this exact same thing, that they are not held accountable. That's what needs to be done.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Ms. Van Den Heuvel?

Petty Officer VAN DEN HEUVEL. Yes, great question. I actually have a list of things and we actually have a program now on Coast Guard where we submit ideas that we want to be implemented in the Coast Guard. I have submitted some of these, but they have gone nowhere.

One thing to prevent retaliation I would love to see implemented is when you have a sexual harassment, sexual assault, or just harassment in general, that command should not be able to evaluate you for at least a year. We have a lot of programs for victims that waive a lot of things for up to a year such as weigh-ins, things like that. A lot of administration things we could implement that for evaluations, but we do not. I had a civil rights complaint against my commanding officer. That commanding officer evaluated me. It's kind of a conflict of interest, and it makes me look worse as a performer to people who have never.

Second, I do agree with Ms. Ward. I think that these captains and flag officers that are not handling these cases right, they need to be named and they are retired. They need to be pulled back in active duty and held accountable so that the future captains and future flag officers are doing their due diligence and processing these cases.

Then third, people who have reported, especially people like myself and Mr. Bell who are in the Coast Guard still, they need to look back into—there needs to be something implemented to where we can submit our cases to be reviewed by an outside agency, not the civil rights process. It does not work. It ultimately goes back to the Coast Guard for their decision. We need to submit to an outside agency so that there is no conflict of interest.

Commanding officers, they typically go to college together. Somebody's making a decision based on—like, Admiral Dash in my situation and Captain Tipton, they were at the academy together. I am asking an admiral to hold a captain accountable, and they probably have a personal-type of relationship. I do not know them in their personal life, so they might not, but if we are submitting to an outside agency, it prevents all of that bias and all that conflict of interest.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Ms. Owen.

Ms. OWEN. I would piggyback on that and say that I think this is an opportunity for us to look out to an outside agency to be able to do anonymous reporting to. I think that's the hardest part, is coming forward and having been in many positions within the work-life realm, folks are even just scared to come in that building because, well, what if my command sees me coming in and they do not really know why I am coming in?

I think if we could take the issue to an outside entity to investigate and potentially bring forward justice for the victims, I think that would be helpful. Not only for the victims, but also for the handful of people that are identified in the Coast Guard to be able

to take these reports. Do that times 20 years, and let me know how your mental health is holding up for you.

I am very thankful that when I retired from the Coast Guard and my first call to the VA was the women's clinic, I said, "I need to start therapy, and I need to start today." They said, "Were you a victim?" I said, yes. They said, "That's all we need to know." I have been in the gentle hands of the VA now for seven years. I am trying to declutter my head of all the victimization stories that I was given.

I think protecting the people in uniform and the civilian employees that work in that environment, I think is helpful to going forward. That's one thing I would recommend.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Great.

Ms. KLEMENT. Senator, I think we can all agree on this table that a third-party investigation is what needs to happen because there's going to be no bias bringing that in. It's also going to bring accountability. If these commands are not doing anything wrong, then they should not be worried about a third party coming in.

I had no idea that there was any outside sources. I did not even know what the Office of Inspector General (OIG) was—I was told that you probably should not call the police department. That's your right, but you just probably should not do it. So there's all these things that they say you can do. I had retaliation against me for even calling a congresswoman.

These are our rights. But with the culture, if you do it, you are going to be shunned. We need to have a third party coming in and doing checks and balances on these commands. The difference with the Coast Guard is there are so many small outlying units that there's very little accountability. The other branches have big bases. There's a lot of eyes there. They are like little cities. We have these little places everywhere, and it's left up to those commands. The trust is put into those commands to make all the right decisions.

Again, you get one CO and an Executive Officer (XO) that are willing to push the envelope and kind of lie for each other, everybody at that unit is screwed. My executive officer who told me to keep my mouth shut is a 2-star admiral now. He was never held accountable. I want to know who's holding them accountable. We need a third party. That's just what needs to happen. They need to have access to it and there needs to be knowledge of it frequently.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Mr. Bell.

Chief BELL. Thank you, Senator. Again, I agree with everything that's been said previously, and I would like to add a few things on my accord. But the big thing that I mentioned earlier is the trust in the system. That's what needs to be restored. In order to do that, the Coast Guard needs to hold themselves accountable. I think starting with Operational Fouled Anchor, it is not just the report itself, but the hiding of the report, and making those people answer for what they did and did not. I mean, that's step one.

Step two, that concur with a third-party oversight in pretty much every aspect, including our investigating authority within ourselves. CGIS handling sexual assault cases has proven time and time again that they are incapable of properly handling these

cases. They have too much skin in the game, so to speak. They work directly with the commands, oftentimes their former command themselves.

It's interesting that you asked earlier about what we would say to our younger selves if we could make a report, feel uncomfortable. My case was actually, again, reopened this year, and CGIS just failed to follow through properly with the investigation. I was not interviewed a second time. My assailant was not approached or interviewed, and the case was waited out until he retired.

Again, CGIS had that in their hands and let it go. That's just my case as one example. As a victim advocate, I work directly with survivors, currently working several cases, and you still see CGIs failing these members. We need to remove that from the service. Thank you.

Ms. KLEMENT. Absolutely.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. These ideas are enormously important and valuable, and I think are going to be part of our final report and our recommendations. What comes across is not only the deterrence to reporting, but also the lack of effective investigation, whether it's because of conflict of interest or the old boys' network.

Mr. Bell, your experience, I think shows it very well. You shared with us that during the initial investigation in 2016, it's not ancient history, this is 2016. You felt that CGIS believed your assailants denial of involvement and not your report of the assault. During the reopened investigation, I understand that when you used material from your initial investigation, you found that some of it was not provided to you or was missing entirely.

Chief BELL. That's correct.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. For me, as a former prosecutor, this is kind of a unconscionable failure of investigation. You cannot have trust, you cannot have people coming forward if the investigation is a sham, and known to be a sham, as undoubtedly happens because everybody knows that the investigation produced nothing.

You told the Subcommittee that CGIS never even interviewed your perpetrator during the reopened investigation. Instead, the case was closed and the district where the individual was then on active duty determined there was not enough information to reduce the rank or pay in that individual's forthcoming retirement.

I guess, focusing on the investigation, do you think the lack of investigation was a problem for you, and have you ever received an explanation?

Chief BELL. I have not, Senator.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. From CGIS? Have they ever given you an explanation?

Chief BELL. No. I asked them directly, the investigators why they did not interview him, why they did not interview me. I did not get an answer. I asked to review information from my initial case in 2016, so I could help the investigation. I was provided missing pieces of my initial case. Like you said, large sections of my interviews were completely missing or actually explained my assault and named other people. All that was not provided.

I was also assigned a lawyer, requested this information, my lawyer's been completely ghosted by CGIS legal for about five months now, trying to get this information. We both submitted Freedom of

Information Act (FOIA) request. I am still waiting for that. I am not sure what I will get.

That's just been very disheartening and it's very common, that tactic of just waiting till someone retires. That happened in my case, and I have heard that time and time again. I have seen it firsthand or command chiefs and captains that are caught in doing something they should not be doing, whether it's assault, harassment, or otherwise. It's just easier to let them retire than prosecute. That is very common.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Which is another common theme. Retirement erases all sins, and it prevents accountability.

Chief BELL. Absolutely.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I think it was maybe Ms. Owen suggested pulling perpetrators back from retirement some way and holding them accountable, or maybe it was—or one of you suggested it. Which would seem to be one of the potential remedies here for imposing accountability. We are talking here about two basic requirements; accountability and transparency. Neither yet has been achieved by the Coast Guard in these kinds of investigations, at least so far.

Let me ask you on the subject of investigating, Ms. Van Den Heuvel. The officer who investigated your report of harassment found that your harasser, not you, violated Article 134 of the uniformed code military justice (UCMJ) for indecent conduct. But you shared that both you and the individual who harassed you were reprimanded. Are you familiar with the same happening again to others who reported that kind of crime? In other words, both the victim or survivor and the perpetrator were in effect punished?

Petty Officer VAN DEN HEUVEL. Absolutely. It's a very common thing that occurs. I do not want to say I consider myself lucky, but I consider women trying to join the Coast Guard lucky that going through that office, because I am very grateful to anything positive that came out of that experience, that he was relieved.

Because a lot of times, the perpetrator, he suggests that they get punished usually for unrelated matters. Find something to force that person out.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. One of the other things that I think comes across in your experience as well as the 80-plus whistleblowers accounts and in our work is that many of these assaulters or harassers went on to do it again. They were not caught, they were not punished, they were not held accountable.

Ms. Klement, I think that you were not the first person to be harassed by the individual you described. To the best of your knowledge, was that individual ever held accountable?

Ms. KLEMENT. Thank you for asking that, Senator.

When I was stationed there, I knew of three women that he had touched. But to my knowledge, nobody had ever reported him. I was told that I was the first. He was a retired senior chief, that he was a contract worker for the Coast Guard. Since I released my survivor video on my own, I have had multiple women tell me that they were assaulted by him, and some for years, that also reported him. He was never held accountable. He retired from that base last summer, so he is now receiving senior chief retirement and GS retirement. No, he was never held accountable.

During my investigation, which I have never seen the full investigation, FOIA won't get my stuff back to me. I made the report early 2013, I got out 2015. The whole time nobody ever contacted me. When I inquired, they said my investigation was still open, so I could not see it. I learned just recently that they closed my investigation two months later, and I was never privy to the information.

The only thing I have seen is the synopsis, and it was a check and balances. They went through the boxes. They interviewed him once. I was also getting sexually harassed by my boss, they interviewed him. Once they interviewed them, they stopped. They never interviewed any of the other women that I said he was touching. No, he was not held accountable, Senator.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Ms. Owen, a fellow service member falsely accused you and several other members, female members, of having inappropriate relationships, as you have just told us, even though his false claims forced you and other women to go through an investigation. That investigation found in fact that he was stalking you. He was allowed to choose between transfer to another duty station and retirement. How did you feel what he was permitted to retire?

Ms. OWEN. At that point, I had days left in the Coast Guard as I was on my terminal leave. I felt like if I said something really bad, they would not kick me out because I was already on my way out. I made a phone call to legal and had that discussion that we could not condone his behavior, nor could we allow him as a perpetrator to be transferred to an isolated duty station to where this could happen again, or even worse.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I know you also reported other types of misconduct, was the treatment of those claims similar.

Ms. OWEN. I did not report the first one, only because I was told, "He's in the brig. Get over it." At that point, I just started to do some self-healing within myself. Knowing that he would not come back. I felt safe, even though I did not even know his name. I felt safe that he would not come back and he would not hurt anyone else.

I think that's half the battle. Is as a victim, you always want to know where your perpetrator lies and you want to keep your eyes on them. You do not want to have them walking around the Coast Guard in a uniform and have to run up on them, or even worse them be your supervisor at a later date.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Let me ask all of you, but beginning with Mr. Bell, because I think you told me that you were not surprised when you learned about Operation Fouled Anchor. Can you tell me why you were not surprised?

Chief BELL. Thank you, Senator. Several reasons for that. I grew up in a Coast Guard family. I have run on the Coast Guard my entire life. My older brother just recently retired as a Boatswain's Mate Class (BMC), as a chief. This is my culture, right? I grew up in this. I understand it. The good, the bad, and the ugly.

With everything that happened with my case, how the investigation went nowhere, and all the things I have seen over the years, especially against female members, it just painted a clear picture of the why. It finally made sense. Everything clicked when Fouled

Anchor was released. It's like, of course, all of this lying and cover-up obligation has been taught at the Academy.

When a cadet harasses or assaults another cadet, and that cadet is let go, there's no problem. Everything's swept under the rug. You just taught the other 400 cadets how to handle a sexual assault, a sexual harassment case, and that's been perpetrated for decades.

When that report came out, I understood the crux of it. It made perfect sense. It was crystal clear. Then, when I realized the report was buried, it made even more sense. Of course, the senior leadership has been lying to us. Of course, they do not truly care. They are more concerned about the image of the Coast Guard, about getting the budget correct as opposed to taking care of their members.

We are really good at waving the flag and showing all the great and wonderful things that we do every day. Because we do them. We do really incredible stuff. That's why I have stayed in for so long. I have loved the mission, but we do not highlight that we need help. That our members are struggling. We would rather put that in the shadows and carry on. When that was released by CNN, it just made perfect sense, Senator.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Were others of you surprised by Operation Fouled Anchor?

Ms. KLEMENT. Senator, I have something to say about that? I was not surprised the least bit because it's exactly what I experienced with my own situation. An issue that I see is that the officers in my situation were more worried about their careers and their advancement than they were about my well-being. I think it's really important to note and see that these officers are under the impression that if an assault happens at their unit, that is going to be a negative mark on them. Therefore that is going to be prevent them from advancing.

The reason they did not give me a 6095, I was never put into the system. Therefore, my command, it looked as if our numbers were lower. Right? I think that we need to fully understand that we will never, ever eradicate sexual assault completely. It has been around since the beginning of time, but what we need to really implement is that the assault itself isn't a stain on that CO, but the way he responds to the assault is what should be bad on his marks or whatever.

Because, obviously, if there's an excessive amount of assaults happening, that's one thing. But my assault should not be a negative mark on his lead because then people are going to be less likely to talk about it, go forward with it because they are not going to be able to move up in the ranks.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Others have you also shook your head that you were not surprised? If you want to elaborate on why you were not surprised?

Petty Officer VAN DEN HEUVEL. I will elaborate, Senator. I was not surprised for two reasons. Statistically, sexual assaults, sexual harassment, happens majority in the military service and college. The Academy is both of those things. It did not surprise me at all that that was happening.

It also does not surprise me that a lot of victims did not get justice. Unfortunately, with sexual assault, it's typically one word versus another. I have reported sexual assault early in my career.

I am blessed to say that my command did take it very serious and that person was discharged. But a lot of times, it's just one word versus another, and there's no evidence.

However, their covering up Operation Fouled Anchor, that also was not surprising. That's where the issue really was for me, because it shows that the Coast Guard is not taking this situation very serious. It just kind of creates a cycle of an issue, because then, they are not reporting and they are not getting care that they need to gather that evidence on the perpetrator accountable.

Ms. WARD. I will add on to that. I was not surprised. I was very sad to hear it. However, the Academy is just one small slice of the entire Coast Guard, and it's happening there. You can guarantee it's happening in the entire Coast Guard.

I worked at a unit who was led by an admiral, and he had an aide. We were giving in-person training for sexual assault and sexual harassment. That aide made this comment that women ask to be raped depending on what they wear. I was a chief warrant officer. I was speechless. The trainer never really corrected this thought process, but at the same time, I am like, wait, you are an academy person. Is this what the Academy preaches? Is this what the Academy teaches you? Did the academy not stop this thought process that you have that depending on what we wear, we are asking for it. I was just at a loss.

When it came out, I was not surprised having had many years of interactions with a bunch of academy graduates and seeing how a bunch of them react still to women being—like, “I was the last graduating class that did not have women,” and how much of a feat that was for them. Right?

The cover-up that happens, because like I said, they look out after their own at all costs. It does not matter how we are treated in the Coast Guard, as long as they are looking out for their own to making sure their own is OK to get them to that highest point they can be to retire. It's a sad story.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. You know one of the documents that was produced to us that was done contemporaneously with the decision not to disclose the report had, in handwriting, pros and cons. The implicit message of that document was the cover-up, in effect, put their individual reputations and, maybe, the Coast Guard, above the fate and well-being of the individuals were victims and survivors.

But the lack of transparency was not really in the interest of the Coast Guard. In other words, the cover-up did not serve the Coast Guard's interest, even though in the short run, they may have felt, well, it was bad for the unit, bad for the reputation of the CO.

I do not know whether any of you have comments on the need for transparency, greater disclosure, more public understanding of this problem. My own view, again, not just a Senator, but a former prosecutor, that the public knowledge and disclosure serves a deterrent to misconduct, particularly sexual assault, and harassment. I do not know whether any of you have comments on the age for transparency and disclosure.

Petty Officer VAN DEN HEUVEL. I do have a comment, Senator. We have this report that comes out every quarter called Good Order and Discipline. It basically lists out any member in the

Coast Guard or civilian who's had any disciplinary. It does not list their names. It just lists their rank and basic charges that they were found to have violated.

I think that when it comes to sexual harassment or sexual assault, they need to be named. Not the victims, that's protected. However, the perpetrators should be named. That would deter people. If people were nervous about their names being out there if they were caught, it would deter them from acting like that.

Ms. WARD. My written statement was the fact that public shaming, as you said, it's about the only way to hold people accountable, because who wants to be named for something that I was covering up? Like, I do not want my name on there, so I am going to do the right thing. It's sad, it's come to this point, but this is where we are today.

Words have not been enough. Commitments have not been enough. New policy has been issued, but what good has that done? That has not done anything. Where are we at now? I agree with Crystal that we have to do some sort of public naming in order to get the high leadership down to the low leadership to understand that this is not acceptable.

Ms. OWEN. I would like to piggyback Senator, if I may, on that. I think specifically the cadets, I think they are in the hardest position than anybody else in the Coast Guard. They are so vested. They spend four years at the Academy learning the Coast Guard inside and out, more so than any of us sitting at the table. We all love our Coast Guard and we know our specialties, but they really bring to the forefront, the future of the Coast Guard. They go on to lead the Coast Guard. They go on to be the commandant of the Coast Guard.

But can you imagine if you were a victim at the Academy and your senior shipmate was the perpetrator, and now you know for 20 years you are going to have to run away from your perpetrator. There should be a checks and balance to allow victims to safely serve their entire career, whether it's 20 or 30 years, and not have to serve with the perpetrator ever again if they so keep them in the military.

I did have that one promise made to me by a master chief. He said what would you like from this? I said I would like to never see that FTC again in my career. He said, well, I make that promise to you today. He gave me his coin, and I never saw him again. Now, wherever he was, I am not sure whether it was just by luck I did not get stationed with him again. But there needs to be a more specific program to ensure that these cadets can go on to have a very successful and safe career after said incidences.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Being a victim of sexual assault or harassment should not mean your retirement, right? Should mean the perpetrators being held accountable, in part because that perpetrator may go on to repeat—

Ms. OWEN. Absolutely.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. [continuing.] The assault or harassment. Mr. Bell, you were recently part of a session. I think it involved one of the new procedures that's been instituted February, 2024. I do not know the exact name of it. I think it was the result of the accountability and transparency review process.

Chief BELL. Yes, sir.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Can you describe what that session was and what your takeaway was?

Chief BELL. Yes, thank you. As part of the accountability transparency review (ATR) for short, the commandant directed 33 different action items. One of the first ones was to hold an executive summit at Coast Guard Headquarters, where all the flag officers were present, as well as your gold batch master chiefs, so all your senior officials, both active and reserved, as well as civilian counterparts.

I was invited to speak at this summit. Through my victim advocacy, I voiced my story, and I shared my experiences with the ATR review team at Coast Guard Headquarters, and was invited to this program. In February of this year, I shared my entire story and was very vocal. Everything that's been said here I also shared. I shared what I thought needed to happen within the Coast Guard about true accountability, how our culture needs to change, how this is a workforce problem, not just an Academy issue.

I received a standing ovation from the crowd. But when the crowd settled, only about two or three people really came out to me and spoke. One of them was Admiral Fagan. I was promised that things would change, and things would get better, and thanks for speaking. I was also approached by the head of CGIS who offered to reopen my case, which we have already discussed how that went.

I felt really humbled to be there. It was a great experience. I was grateful to be there. To finally be able to say my peace with the senior staff of the Coast Guard was cathartic. There were people in that room that were with me when I was assaulted, that were stationed with me. Ms. Norberg was also there just by coincidence. She's been heavily involved in my case since 2016.

It was a real honor to do that. But I also felt it was the typical song and dance at the same time. There was a lot of empty promises being made, a lot of talk. Since February, we have kind of seen where things have headed with the recent congressional hearings, the recent committee hearings. I still feel jaded, I think, by everything and that's kind of why I am here today, so is to keep saying what we're saying and to say that we can have these meetings, we can talk about this stuff, but until we truly hold ourselves accountable, especially the senior staff and the prior administrations, the previous commandant, the people that hid Fouled Achor.

Again, I said this to the Commandant and to everyone in that room that we need to hold ourselves accountable in order to move forward. We can make these program changes and policy changes, and those are great, but we are not rebuilding the trust from the crew. That's where our issues lie.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. That was the Senior Executive ATR Implementation Summit to "discuss the accountability and transparency review as well Operation Fouled Anchor". I appreciate your commenting on that. The fact is that a great many of the directed actions from that ATR implementation summit. The review itself involves some type of training or resource offering. Five of the requirements; an online sexual assault prevention response, recovery training, Coast Guard-wide workplace climate survey, a toolkit

for unit level sexual misconduct discussions, work life resource hub series of in-person workforce training modules have been marked as complete as of last month. Do you think that that these kinds of actions are enough?

Chief BELL. I think those are a great start, and those are good things. We need those. We need that data. We need that information. We need to educate our workforce and educate our leaders on how to properly handle assault cases. But then, again, I just go back to the culture, and I go back to the underlying trust issues throughout the service. If we do not address that, all the other policies and changes and all the money we put into these efforts, it's going to be for waste.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. What really is needed at the end of the day is accountability, transparency—

Mr. BELL. Yes, Senator.

Petty Officer VAN DEN HEUVEL. Yes.

Senator BLUMENTHAL [continuing.] I think there's a strong degree of enthusiasm for that point.

Mr. BELL. Yes, Senator.

Senator BLUMENTHAL [continuing.] The record should reflect. Let me ask, finally, any of you have perspectives on do urgency of this Mr. Bell, Ms. Van Den Heuvel, you are still members of the Coast Guard. You are on active duty. You see the issues of morale, accountability, transparency, firsthand every day. Tell me how urgent you feel this issue is and any of the others you have perspective on.

Petty Officer VAN DEN HEUVEL. Senator, I think it's extremely urgent, and I would urge something to be rolled out about that policy or procedure within the next—I know it takes time, but the next year or so, because we are already—I think our numbers are worth about 4,000 enlisted members short of what we need in the Coast Guard.

Not only this, there's other factors that go into that. But with the way social media works and the way that young people research decisions, they are sharing. There are people on Reddit, there are people on TikTok sharing their stories about what they experienced in the Coast Guard and other branches. People are going to continue to not want to serve unless the people who have been victims are speaking up saying, yes, this is true. This did happen, but now it's like this. I would urge the next year or so.

Chief BELL. I concur, absolutely. The urgency is there as needed. Now we need to take these actions and move forward. There's people right here at this table that still hurt from all this. There's junior members going through bootcamp today that are at the Academy today that are facing these realities every single day. We do not have time to waste. I believe we need to enact change now.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Two points. I think the point that you just made is so enormously important. All of the services are having trouble meeting their goals. As a member of the Armed Services Committee, we are really troubled by the fact that in an all-volunteer; Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard, we depend on people coming forward, have to want to serve.

You are doing recruitment right now, or you have done it for a while, you were doing it. You see firsthand the issues that young

people have as concerns when they make that decision, whether to raise their right hand to serve our country. This problem is pervasive and persistent as it is going to have a major impact on recruiting.

The other point that I think was made that struck me a couple of you have mentioned not only that the assaulters or harassers were allowed to retire without accountability, but some of them are now admirals or in positions of command. What does that say about Coast Guard in real time right now? That the lack of accountability has enabled them to continue their careers and maybe allow others to continue their careers after the investigation should have held them accountable.

I think that is another consequence of the ongoing problem and another reason why action is particularly urgent. You said, Ms. Ward. The time for words is over. It is time for action. That really has been one of the themes that has been constant that we have heard from whistleblowers and others.

I just want to assure all of you that we are very action-oriented. We are very focused on results. More than just training and education. As important as it is, it's important. We want to see other actions, more accountability and transparency.

I do not know whether any of you are still having problems getting records. Ms. Clement, you are nodding. Mr. Bell, still having problems getting records from the Coast Guard disclosure about your own cases? Maybe you can talk a little bit about that.

Ms. KLEMENT. Senator, I have never seen my investigation in its entirety. I have never seen what my perpetrator said. I have never had access to it. I submitted a FOIA, I think it was, May 29th. Officially, I still do not have access. I did inquire about it while I was still active duty and they would not give it to me then, either. We will see if I ever get it back.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Mr. Bell.

Chief BELL. Yes, Senator. Same thing I mentioned previously with the reopening of my investigation. The information that was provided to me from my 2016 investigation was missing large portions of it. I did not receive any kind of written statement or any information on who they interviewed. Absolutely nothing.

Since the reopening of my investigation, I tried to get it again with my lawyer that was assigned to me and CGIA legal has been stonewalling us and refused our FOIA request. I had to resubmit another FOIA request, and we are just playing the game at this point. I know your office has also dealt with trying to get Coast Guard documents in a timely fashion, and it just seems to be part for the course.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. There's really no excuse for the refusal to disclose these kinds of documents in your own cases or to resist our Subcommittee's request for documents because they are regarded as, and I am quoting, "Sensitive". There's no legal privilege or basis to resist that kind of disclosure to our Committee or Subcommittee.

The Coast Guard's been doing better under pressure. after a year-long investigation, we are receiving more of the documents that we requested, but we are still working on it. It's still a work in progress and I hope that the Coast Guard will be more receptive than they have been to disclosure to our Subcommittee.

I want to give each of you an opportunity to say anything in closing that you might want to take whatever time you would like give each of you an opportunity if you would like to make some closing remarks.

Ms. WARD. Thank you. I appreciate that. I do not want you to get this wrong. I love the Coast Guard. I still do, but there's a certain part of the Coast Guard that's completely broken, and it's a national emergency. Shall we need to "pop a flare"? My husband likes to say.

The Coast Guard needs help in this particular aspect. I am really heartbroken that the Coast Guard is not being transparent with you. I would get congressionals all the time in my jobs throughout my career, and we always had to hop to and get it done. To hear that what they are doing to you just broke my heart because that is not normal. From my experience, I would have to put everything down and get it done quick and fast. That's what I did. Because it's very important.

To see how they are treating you. Just goes back to the whole, we are going to hide it because things were wrong, and we do not want to show exactly how bad it's, and they are protecting themselves. There's no other way to look at it as why are we hiding it? Like, why can't we just give you all the documents you are asking for?

Throughout my career, I came across working for certain people, and Tina came across the particular officer that we had in common years apart from each other, but with the same mentality. He went on from where I saw him, and he went into more position of power. He retired as an admiral. A beloved admiral, that everybody would talk about how wonderful this admiral was. But when you actually saw and had to work for him, and saw how he treated you, if you were not one of the boys, it shed a different light. This particular culture needs to really stop, and it needs to stop now.

And training. You can give all the training you want. I did 20-plus years of training. Training is great, don't get me wrong. But when people are not following what is written in policy, when they are not following what's written in law, when they are not following the training, who's holding them accountable? No one. No one's holding anybody accountable.

My thing is, starting from the top, you need to work all our way down. Current, and prior, retirees, separated, whatever you have in your power under the law, and anything you have in your tool belt, I really urge you to utilize those to tell the Coast Guard that this culture is no longer going to be condoned. We are putting a stop to it right now through action.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Petty Officer VAN DEN HEUVEL. Like Ms. Ward, I know it can come off testifying about sensitive situations with the Coast Guard that I do not like the Coast Guard. However, the opposite is true. I absolutely love the Coast Guard. Everybody who meets me knows that I love the Coast Guard.

Before this last incident in 2022, I was a recruiter, and I volunteered to actually compete in the Coast Guard to be a recruiter. I competed against hundreds of members in that position because the Coast Guard absolutely changed my life. I am from an impover-

ished area of San Louis, Missouri, and I had experiences and opportunities that I never would have had if I did not join the Coast Guard.

For me to sit here and say anything negative about the Coast Guard to show how urgent and how serious the situation is, just like you said, Senator, when you truly do support something, you want the best version of that if you want to ensure that the right things are being done. That is why I am here, and I really appreciate you inviting me.

Ms. OWEN. In closing, I would like to say I too came from a very poor upbringing. So, joining the Coast Guard was like staying at a Hilton. It was pretty impressive. I was excited. I got food every day. I got clothes to wear and I actually got to see the world.

For me, there was no giving up. I just ask you respectfully, Senator, that you will dig a little into the past and know that this is not the first time these issues have been brought to light and brought to the public. We are the smallest branch of the military services. If this is going on with the Coast Guard, I can only imagine what could be going on with the other branches of the service.

I think your message should not only just be to the Coast Guard, but be to all the branches, and to the United States of America. That sexual harassment and sexual assault will not be tolerated. There will be measures in place that will allow victims to live in a healthy state of mind, and perpetrators will be penalized.

I thank you again for having us, and I hope that we do not have to have too much more retraumatization because we are retired as a collective group. You punch your card when you feel like you cannot do another day. I know that to be certain for myself. That 22 years seemed like a long time, but I know that I could have helped a lot more folks if I would have had a better environment to stay in. I think your message back to Congress and to this country is that we stand united and we won't tolerate this anymore. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Ms. KLEMENT. Senator, I just want to say that I am so grateful to be here. This has been a very healing experience for the younger version of myself. I think that there needs to be a way to hold these people accountable and to bring them back. They did a lot of turmoil in just our lives and so many others.

I also came from just a middle-class family who loves America. I could not afford to go to college. The Coast Guard was the option that I had, and I was really excited and happy to serve my country. I am still proud that I made that decision.

I was telling them last night at dinner, as weird as it feels, I do not regret joining the Coast Guard. I do love the Coast Guard. I love what it stands for. I love so many people in the Coast Guard. There are so many wonderful people there, but unfortunately, the people that are in charge are not making the right decisions. They are teaching the people below them to not make the right decisions. I would just love to be able to see accountability. Thank you.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Chief BELL. Thank you, Senator. Thank you everyone. I also like to express my gratitude for being here today, for meeting—already

friends with Meghan. But meeting everyone else in this panel is truly an honor, and it really is.

All of us have gone before us and spoken. It's the saying that we stand on the shoulders of giants. That is absolutely true. My thing with all this really, Senator, is the culture is rebuilding trust because the Coast Guard's going to continue. No matter what we do today, we will always be here, hopefully, as a Nation. Our jobs are important, our missions are important, protecting our nation is important, and protecting our members is equally important.

We need to have leaders that are fully capable to do that, that own their mistakes. Just as I teach my two children, you make a mistake, or if you do something wrong, even if it was not a mistake, you did it on purpose, you own it. You say, "Yes, I did that. I'll learn from it. I am going to try to do better next time." We still do not have that. We do not have our leadership owning the past, owning the damage that has been done.

That would be my call for this, Senator. Let's own up to our past. Let's move forward. Let's keep pushing. We can make this a wonderful place to work and to serve. Everyone deserves the respect. We are all volunteers. We all sign up willingly to serve our country and to potentially lay down our lives for that cause. We deserve that respect. We deserve to be taken care of. Until we have that, this issue will continue. Thank you, Senator.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. Let me again say thank you to all of you. Not only for your courage and strength, but also your eloquence and your insight. This hearing has been enormously valuable. I know that you are here because you love the Coast Guard, all of you. Let nobody be under any misimpression that you are here because, like all of us, you revere and respect this great service.

Also make no mistake that the other branches of our military have the same kinds of issues. I have spent 14 years on the Armed Services Committee, and from day one, sexual assault and harassment has been an issue that we have tried to confront in every one of those other military services.

I have worked with Senator Gillibrand who's been a great leader on this issue in legislation, and investigation, in meetings, and hearings. We are not singling out the Coast Guard. In fact, to give the Coast Guard credit, this investigation started because of an investigation done by the Coast Guard itself. Operation Fouled Anchor uncovered this problem, but then unfortunately, the leadership of the Coast Guard, then leadership, decided to conceal it and cover it up.

They would have done a great service to the Coast Guard if they had simply in 2020, given it to the Congress and said, we have a problem, but we are going to deal with it. The commandant came before our Subcommittee and in her testimony, she said, "We will become an organization that is intolerant of harmful behaviors, that is myopically focused on transparency, and creates accountability for every member of the organization."

But as you have observed so well, we are past the point where words are sufficient. We need to see action and your recommendations provide a good basis going forward. We have heard others, we are going to incorporate them in our report. We are not about just

uncovering evidence. We are about making recommendations that that's what you want to do.

We are going to try to persuade the Coast Guard to match the courage and strength of the whistleblowers who have come forward, including yourself, with the actions that it can do going forward. It's not just an act that's important. It's the future of the Coast Guard. It depends on accountability and transparency.

I can simply pledge to you that we are going to continue this investigation, and we are going to do it with a sense of urgency that you described because time is not on our side. The brave and dedicated men and women who wake up every day in the Coast Guard and protect our nation at risk to themselves, often in harm's way, deserve nothing less than the truth telling that we're going to demand of the Coast Guard and the action that hopefully will fall to make the Coast Guard be better.

My thanks to every one of you for being here today. Thanks again to Connecticut College for hosting us. I recognize that each of you in the course of going through this experience, has had to relive some of those experiences that you would rather put behind you just as investigations of this topic forced others to so as well. It's especially meaningful that you are here today. This investigation will continue to be bipartisan, nothing political about it. My hope is we will finish as soon possible.

With that the record will remain open for 15 days for any additional comments that you would like to make or questions that my colleagues may have that you can respond in writing to.

Thank you all. The meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:20 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
Hearing on “Coast Guard Whistleblowers: Sexual Assault and Harassment”
August 8, 2024

Chair Richard Blumenthal, Opening Statement

Thank you for being here. I am honored to welcome all of you to this hearing of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. Let me just say, by way of introduction, how grateful I am to Connecticut College for giving us this great venue and to all of the folks in the audience who have come to hear us. Many of you may be Coast Guard retirees or even active-duty, and I want to thank you for your service, as well as the witnesses who are with us today, retired or currently serving.

We are in New London, which has a special affinity and tie to the Coast Guard. All of us in Connecticut have a tremendous respect, admiration, even reverence and affection for the Coast Guard, because we are home to the Coast Guard Academy, and we will soon be home to the new Coast Guard Museum. We are really looking forward to that museum being here in Connecticut to celebrate the tremendous contribution over centuries to our nation by the Coast Guard.

Every day, thousands of men and women put on Coast Guard uniforms—and serve and sacrifice for our nation. They protect our nation and provide a contribution to our national defense and our criminal justice system that is invaluable, that is beyond words an asset to this great nation. But at the same time, many of them are survivors of sexual assault and harassment. We are honored to have with us today five survivors of sexual assault and harassment. We issued a report yesterday with dramatic, moving accounts of the stories from more than 80 whistleblowers, about their experiences in the Coast Guard as survivors and the discouraging, shaming messages that were sent to them about coming forward. The retribution that they encounter and the lasting ramifications to their lives.

Nearly a year ago, this Subcommittee opened a bipartisan inquiry into the Coast Guard's mishandling of sexual assault and harassment cases at the Coast Guard Academy and its subsequent failure to disclose its investigation of those cases to the Congress. Operation Fouled Anchor was the name of that investigation, and it began as an investigation in 2014 to cover a period of the 1990s to 2006. But that investigation was itself covered up. It was completed in 2020. It was disclosed in 2023, only because of a news report that found it and revealed it to the public. Operation Fouled Anchor and its cover-up revealed a deep moral rot within the Coast Guard's ranks, and an utter abandonment of the honor, respect, and devotion to duty that comprise the Coast Guard's core values.

This Subcommittee's investigation has revealed an even deeper decay. The scourge of sexual assault and harassment is not a past problem. It is not limited to the Academy. It is persistent and pervasive, affecting not only the Coast Guard Academy but also the ranks of active-duty personnel around the globe. The culture of cover-up that hid Operation Fouled Anchor continues to this day, and that's the reason why we are here—so that the Coast Guard will, in fact, change course in the right direction and lead by example, not only for itself but for other military services where sexual assault and harassment continues as a problem as well.

This Subcommittee launched its investigation seeking evidence about Operation Fouled Anchor, but right after we began, we heard from a legion of whistleblowers, past and present, men and women, from across the Coast Guard, cadets, officers, and enlisted with service spanning more than five decades. Yesterday the report that we issued—and I'm going to make it a part of this record and formally open the hearing—because we wanted to elevate statements from those individuals who bravely came forward to share their experiences with this Subcommittee. In the words of just one of those individuals, “I never came forward to report my assaults. I knew I would not be taken seriously, and I saw how women who did come forward were treated. They would be blamed for causing their assault, punished for consuming alcohol or other infractions that paled in comparison to the crimes committed against them, or victims wouldn't be believed that they were assaulted in the first place.” And as another individual who reported sexual assault put it, “During the investigation, they found that this was a pattern of behavior for him even in previous units. He had never been held accountable ever. It was sickening and humiliating. It was a slap in the face of all victims.”

The experiences relayed in this report underscore what this investigation has already made abundantly clear. The problem of sexual assault and harassment in the Coast Guard is still far too pervasive. It is persistent and ongoing, and it affects officers and enlisted in present service. In fact, well over half the whistleblowers who shared their experiences with this Subcommittee describe instances of sexual assault or harassment that occurred while serving on recent active duty.

As I told Admiral Fagan, Commandant of the Coast Guard, when she appeared before the Subcommittee earlier this summer, these survivors have shown that the Coast Guard's failings did not just exist in the past. They are happening right now, and the Coast Guard must be addressing them.

Today, we will hear from five of these brave individuals, all of whom enlisted in the Coast Guard. On behalf of myself and all of my colleagues, I want to thank each of you for being here today. I want to thank you for your courage and tenacity in coming forward. And I also want to share the words of another member who cannot be with us today, Lieutenant Commander Samantha Block. She reported sexual harassment during her second tour years ago. She thought the individual she reported had retired then, but earlier this year, she learned that that was not the case. She told the Subcommittee, “I found out that he went on to another unit and continued his behavior. That has been the worst part of this whole ordeal for me to cope with because I did what I was supposed to do. I made the report, I raised the alarm. And it was not enough.”

The Coast Guard, like the Academy, fostered an environment that seemingly from the top down not only enabled sexual assault and harassment to persist but also fueled the culture that has discouraged survivors from reporting and failed to treat those survivors with the seriousness and respect they deserve.

I was encouraged that the Coast Guard announced a safe-to-report policy earlier this year, responding to the problems that have been disclosed by this investigation and others. I also understand that Admiral Fagan has directed that the Coast Guard take 33 actions after the

completion of the Accountability and Transparency Review initiated earlier last year.

I don't need to tell anybody here that talk about reform is not enough. The service from the top down must ensure that everyone who serves follows these expressed commitments. I am also concerned that the Coast Guard has been late and lagging in making disclosures to this Subcommittee. We have received additional document production, but it has been long after we made requests, and then only because we made the possibility of compulsory process very real and direct for the Coast Guard.

Again, I want to be clear. I have enormous respect and admiration for the Coast Guard and all who serve in its ranks. I recognize all of the service that they have done for this country. I'm going to continue to be a strong supporter of the Coast Guard. As a member of the Armed Services Committee, as well as the Veteran Affairs Committee, I'm going to support the brave individuals who come forward and serve in the Coast Guard. But the strongest supporters of the Coast Guard also have to be the biggest advocates for change, to rid the scourge of sexual misconduct and the culture of concealment that imperil it now and in the future.

Written Statement by
Shawna Ward
CWO4 (PERS), USCG, Retired

I want to thank this committee for allowing our voices to be heard and for your continuous efforts to uncover the true 'culture' of the Coast Guard.

This culture has saturated the entire Coast Guard fleet starting as early as bootcamp and continuing throughout a career. These incidents are not immune to ranks or rates as mine occurred when I was the most junior enlisted and continued to the most senior rank I could achieve as a Chief Warrant Officer 4.

Unfortunately, I am only one of many who experienced sexual assaults by a Coast Guard member. Like others, my experiences also involved harassment as well as a hostile workplace.

In 1994, I passed through the gates of Training Center Cape May for bootcamp. It would be during this initial 8-week period my experience with the Coast Guard culture began. Permanent party males told all 6 females in my company we will soon be 'barefoot and pregnant' to indicate we would not be in the Coast Guard long and were called "tree huggers". These comments were made in a classroom with a vast amount of permanent party personnel in attendance. At no time did anyone address these comments as inappropriate. This spoke loud and clear: these types of comments toward females were acceptable.

This same culture, that allowed these types of 'acceptable' comments, continued at my very first unit.

Immediately after reporting, I was interrogated for personal information to include my sex life. I was verbally counseled about inappropriate relationships from nearly everyone on duty that weekend before I even met the Officer In Charge. I was also told I was replacing a female SN, who slept with a married BM2 at the unit, and *she* was transferred north to the Group. This same married BM2 also slept with a wife of a MK at this unit and years later would return to this unit as the Officer In Charge upon achieving the rank of a BMC.

In my own duty section, I had a male BM3 who kindly provided me invaluable training, knowledge, and assistance. This great deed created an even greater culture unaccepting of a male and a female, who remained professional, to spend time together or have any conversations on or off duty.

To give a clearer picture of this culture, a BM3 from the opposite duty section threw a paper across the table at me while saying “F\$king women in the F\$king Coast Guard!” This paper showed a female would be reporting to the unit soon.

My first assault occurred at this unit. The culture I endured made it unacceptable to speak to anyone higher than my own paygrade. Even if I could speak, I didn’t know who to contact. With just a year in the Coast Guard, I was led to believe I would receive punishment if I spoke to someone. Therefore, I remained silent.

When I departed this unit, I was given one of the saddest yet the most beneficial advice I had in my career which was directly in response to the unit’s culture I endured. The male Executive Petty Officer told me this is not fair, and it should not be this way for females, but this is the way it is: “As a female in the Coast Guard, you will always be under a microscope”. He further explained I must work harder, swim faster, shoot better, arrive earlier, stay later, etc. This meant I must do everything quicker and better than my male co-workers.

At my next unit, as one of only two females, I experienced an even worse culture.

I listened to a BM3 near me discuss events that occurred the night prior in his barracks room and how he made the girl ‘sleep in the wet spot’. While hearing this, I looked around a room full of males of all ranks who were listening to this conversation and laughing. In my eyes, this conversation was accepted and encouraged by leadership as not one person told the BM3 his conversation was inappropriate. Their actions of laughing spoke loud and clear: this behavior is accepted in the Coast Guard.

Because conversations like this was accepted, similar conversations occurred daily. While sitting at a table, I heard two male MK’s talking while grabbing their food and drinks. When the first male was filling his cup with milk, the second male started to laugh saying, “Don’t you get enough milk at home sucking your wife’s tits?” This statement occurred because the first male’s wife recently had a baby and was nursing.

I also experienced firsthand what happens when someone does speak up. While underway on the 44’ boat I was directed by the coxswain to go below deck. When I inquired on the reason, I was accused of disobeying a direct order and instructed to do what I was told. When I discovered the reason was so the male crew could urinate off the side of the boat to avoid using the onboard porta-potty, I stated, “If the Commandant was onboard, would you urinate off the side of the boat?” This statement did not go over well with the crew as I was further chastised for not doing what I was told.

My second assault occurred at this unit. This assault, like the first, went unreported. Why? This culture condoned it and the lack of action from leaders allowed it.

The Commanding Officer of the unit, a Lieutenant Commander, would conduct frequent all-hands meetings. During these meetings, the Lieutenant Commander would talk to and about “His Boys” such as ‘how are my boys’ and ‘how great my boys performed during the SAR case’. This group of boys was referred to by others as “The Boys Club”. Since the Lieutenant Commander always made it clear how proud he was of “His Boys” while referring to them by name, the crew knew who were in this club. The males within this club could do no wrong; a group of them physically attacked a male coworker while he slept, would assault their own spouses or other civilians, one sexually assaulted me, and the list goes on.

When I did mention the culture and what occurs, I was quickly summoned to the CO’s office and the Lieutenant Commander demanded I provide him the names. Knowing the incidents were from those inside this club, I was unwilling to provide names because I knew no one would be held accountable. However, I gathered enough courage to say the entire unit needed sexual assault and harassment training. In response, the Lieutenant Commander stated, “Didn’t you want to go to Group when the personnel records were moved there? How about you report to Group tomorrow. Problem solved.” This simple statement spoke loud and clear: if you speak up, you are the problem. I was immediately sent to another unit.

While my interactions with this Lieutenant Commander was relatively short in time, his actions had a long-lasting impact on me. Many in the Coast Guard saw this Lieutenant Commander differently and often spoke fondly of him, however, there were others I met throughout my career who had similar experiences with this Lieutenant Commander and his “Boy’s Club”. Years later, I would meet one such female who crossed paths with this Lieutenant Commander. She is also sitting before you today providing her testimony. While our interactions with this Lieutenant Commander were years apart, we personally experienced what happened if an issue was brought to this Lieutenant Commander that involved one of “His Boys”. This Lieutenant Commander achieved the rank of Admiral prior to his retirement.

I experienced sexual misconduct at various units while climbing in rank. The most significant occurred at a newly commissioned “elite” unit that contained the best and the brightest in the Coast Guard.

Shortly after reporting to this elite unit as a Chief Warrant Officer 2, I was told a Lieutenant Commander would become my new supervisor. Within days, my interactions with this Lieutenant Commander quickly became a

hostile workplace. He was often physically within inches of me, continually showed bullying behavior through his physical and verbal actions, and on many occasions, I thought he was going to physically hit me.

When I brought these issues to my leadership, I was told to “play the game”. Although I told others what I was experiencing, my concerns were dismissed and repeatedly told it couldn’t be *that* bad.

Not sure who else to turn to for help, I reached out to CG Headquarters overseeing sexual harassment and hostile workplace. Initially, Headquarters stated they could provide me assistance, but quickly reversed course when they heard what unit was involved. With no other options, I submitted a hostile workplace complaint to Headquarters against my Lieutenant Commander. Because of the complaint, I was required to go through specific courses of action such as attending a meeting with the Lieutenant Commander. When I walked into the conference room for this meeting, one side of the conference table contained about a half dozen personnel, including the Lieutenant Commander, while my side contained me and the one person I was allowed for this meeting. At this point I knew the meeting was going to be one sided, against me. During the meeting, unit leadership stated a hostile workplace does not exist because the Lieutenant Commander has not physically hit me. Although I stated a physical touch is not required for a hostile workplace, I was quickly dismissed saying it does by everyone in attendance. This meeting spoke loud and clear: Lieutenant Commander’s actions were acceptable.

As far as trainings, there was an in-person mandated training for sexual assault and harassment taught by Headquarters. In this training we watched the same video’s and received the same training materials that’s presented year after year. In this training, the Admirals aid, a male officer, said “a female is asking to be assaulted if she wears a short skirt, short shorts, or a revealing top.”

To my knowledge, this male officer was a product of the CG Academy which was a huge concern. If this officer thought this way, how many other officers thought the same out of the Academy? Is the Academy pushing this thought regarding females?

As an outcome of my complaint, I was able to depart the unit a year after I arrived. Upon my departure, I met with the Commanding Officer, an Admiral, who told me he was sorry I had a ‘personality conflict’ with the Lieutenant Commander. I stated I was sorry he was told there was a ‘personality conflict’ as that was far from the truth. Unfortunately, the Admiral did not ask me to expand on my statement and remained silent. The Admiral’s actions to remain silent spoke loud and clear: the Lieutenant Commander’s action and the actions under the Admirals leadership was acceptable.

Throughout my years of service, it always sounded like a broken record the Coast Guard continued to play over and over, year after year. They always said they are changing their culture, however, the lack of action from the Coast Guard spoke louder than their own words. Not holding personnel accountable for their actions and often promoting these personnel to high-ranking positions to continue to spread this culture seemed to be the theme. The Coast Guard, through their actions, condones this culture.

There are 'unspoken' rules among groups of Officers and Enlisted that look out after their own, at all costs. The Admirals look out after themselves and do not step out of line within the group. Like the Admirals, the Captains adhere to this unspoken rule, and they too look out after their own. On the enlisted side, the Chief's Mess - E-7 to E-10 - looks out after their own. As someone who was part of the Chief's Mess, I too know about the unspoken that occurs. For example, in response to a Chief who was arrested for a DUI, nearly everyone in this large Chief's Mess signed a character letter for their fellow Chief. Although this Chief and the Chief's Mess knew the consequences for drinking and driving, they still signed this letter saying what a "great guy" this person was, and how this person needed a "second chance" due to a "minor lapse in judgement". On the contrary, junior enlisted are separated for the same action without a second thought. While there are some good personnel within these groups, there are only a *few* willing to go against their own group to better the Coast Guard. This is a significant reason there is a lack of accountability and transparency for the sexual misconduct that occurs.

In January 1974, the first group of enlisted females called "regulars" reported to bootcamp. During this time, the Coast Guard could have worked on their culture, but they made the decision to not make their culture a priority. When I joined in 1994 – 20 years later – this culture was still running rampant. Again, the Coast Guard could have made this culture a priority, yet again, they made the decision not to. Although it's been over 50 years since the "regulars" arrived to bootcamp, females have been apart of this organization since 1830. When will the Coast Guard make changing their culture a *true* priority?

Even in this culture, there are a few willing to find a way to make those silenced feel safe and heard. I was fortunate to become part of a group that was created for females where you felt safe and could share your own experiences. This group was beneficial as many learned they were not alone in their experiences with this culture.

I still love the Coast Guard, but I am heartbroken they had 24 years during my career to fix their culture. I always adhered to the Coast Guard's Core Values of Honor, Respect, Devotion to Duty and frequently put the Coast Guard ahead of my own family. I lost a lot of valuable time with my family and missed precious

moments with my children because I cherish the Coast Guard and really believed the culture would change. Today, I look back and wonder if it was all for nothing because the Coast Guard never made changing their culture a true priority. The Coast Guard's lack of actions and accountability speak loud and clear: this 'culture' *is* acceptable.

In the end, I am left to wonder how many more generations of females and males must go through similar experiences before the Coast Guard makes its culture a priority and truly takes significant action across all ranks, high and low, to fix it. I am also left to wonder when the Coast Guard will stop covering and making excuses for those creating and continuing the culture while pushing out the brave souls seeking to fix it. Unfortunately, it seems this just may be too big of a feat for the Coast Guard and something I will not see corrected during my lifetime.

I had to find peace with my decisions for not speaking up when I should have during my time in the Coast Guard. I have endured years of counseling and mental health programs to work through my traumatic experiences and still continue to deal with the aftermath from incidents that occurred decades ago. With all the odds against me, I am very fortunate to have had a successful career. Unfortunately, not everyone is able to say the same. I can only hope sharing my experiences help make the Coast Guard a better place than when I left and prevent others from enduring similar experiences.

For the last 194 years, the Coast Guard has allowed this culture to continue across the fleet. To truly enact a change in culture, the Coast Guard must be held accountable for condoning this culture by utilizing all tools and laws available to Congress. Words and commitments from Coast Guard leaders have shown this is not enough to fix the culture. Only through *real* actions, starting with the Commandant, will true change begin to spread throughout the fleet. Holding current, retired, and separated personnel equally accountable from the highest of ranks – such as current and past Commandants - to the lowest of ranks, through transparency, will the fleet start to see a change. This also includes holding the groups of Officers and Enlisted, who look out after their own at all costs, equally accountable for their actions or lack of it. To ensure there is transparency with the actions of the Coast Guard, I strongly urge Congress to publicly release the names of all Coast Guard personnel who committed, covered up, condoned, and supported the years of sexual misconduct. Unfortunately, it will only be through this type of transparency that the culture truly begins to change.

While the Coast Guard should be a place to thrive, for a lot of females and males, the Coast Guard is a place to survive. Through your actions, Congress **MUST** speak loud and clear to the Coast Guard: **this culture will NO LONGER be condoned.**

Written statement of YN1 Crystal Van Den Heuvel

My name is Petty Officer First Class Crystal Van Den Heuvel. At the time of the sexual misconduct my name was Petty Officer First Class Crystal Island, and I was assigned as a production recruiter to Coast Guard Recruiting Office (CGRO) in Hampton Roads, Virginia. I reported to the CGRO in July 2022, was sexually harassed four months later, then later relieved after reporting the incident in January 2023.

In November 2022 I received orders to report to recruiter orientation at Cape May, New Jersey. Aviation Maintenance Technician First Class WILLIAMS requested a ride with me to the training location. I agreed as long as he assured it was ok with his wife, as I was a single woman. We began our travel to Cape May on 28 November 2022. On the way to the training location WILLIAMS following a conversation regarding a TikTok video where a woman asked a male friend if women can pee with a tampon in, WILLIAMS stated he is sexually attracted to women peeing. He admits this to numerous people listed in the report of investigation; however, he places blame on me saying I initiated that topic. He then took notice that I was uncomfortable and began asking if I was going to tell people and stating he didn't know why he told me that. Trying to diffuse a very unsafe situation for myself as a small woman traveling alone at night with an upset male in unfamiliar area, I stated I wouldn't tell anybody and that it would be an inside joke. I told the investigator CWO INGRAM this as well. I did make jokes with WILLIAMS, but none about the topic of urination. The jokes I made were about how long it has taken him to advance and how he isn't a qualified recruiter. There were numerous witnesses to these jokes. During training WILLIAMS texted me numerous times alluding to listening to me urinate through my barracks room wall. He even texted me asking why I turn the water on when I pee. This is only something somebody would know if they were listening. I never responded to these types of messages and when I did not, he would send a follow up text after about 20 minutes saying he was just joking. However, I did not plan to report any of this for sexual harassment. The reason for this was because through my experience in the Coast Guard I know how women who make reports are treated. They are victim blamed and blamed for the male's behavior. I had just reported to the recruiting office and did not want to be labeled an issue. I did not want my coworkers to avoid me, which had happened before when I reported a rape at my first unit by my then supervisor BM3 Robert Johnson. WILLIAMS also stated to me and another Coast Guard Member that he would cheat on his wife if they had to be apart for extended periods of time. I told him this was completely inappropriate, he was a bad husband, and his wife deserved better. Again, I was not going to report this for sexual harassment as I was afraid of being labeled as an "issue." I instead confided in very close friends and told them I would never allow myself to travel with this member again for any reason after we returned from Cape May.

On 02 December 2022 WILLIAMS and myself began our travel back to Hampton Roads, Virginia. During this trip he brought up hanging out with my roommate in our barracks room while I was out for dinner with a friend. He stated he saw my suitcase and saw my "panties" and wanted to take a pair. I immediately responded with "YOU'RE KIDDING!" His reaction to my response was disbelief that I was shocked. He said, "What, I was going to give them back, I just wanted to smell them." I again gave him an opportunity to say he was joking, which he did not. He then began repeatedly trying to get into my bags and suitcases in the backseat of my car. When I asked what he was doing he stated, "he was trying to find my underwear." I asked him to stop and stated he wouldn't be able to find them. He then began trying to get me to pull the car over by asking if we were low on gas. I asked him if he asked that because he needed to stop. He stated he didn't need anything, but it would be easier to get into the back seat if we were parked. I was extremely uncomfortable, and he made comments about it. He asked me what

was wrong with what he said, and I said he was married, and I wasn't interested in being the other woman. I also stated if he wanted to smell a woman's underwear he could smell his wife's. He did not stop attempting to get my underwear until I threatened to kick him out of the car and make his wife and four kids come pick him up. He was dumbfounded on why I would do that. It was like he did not grasp how inappropriate what he was doing was; like something was missing in his brain. I dropped him off at home and minutes after I received a picture of him smelling his wife's underwear with a text that said, "as requested." I want to be very clear I DID NOT request that photograph. I did not respond to this picture. Over the weekend of 03 December and 04 December 2022 he sent numerous texts shown in Exhibit (F-1f) coming up with excuses to try and get me to meet up with him outside of work. I denied every request and said he could get anything he left in my car on Monday at work.

I thought about the drive back all weekend and I feared this member. I had my daughter's dad, who I was legally separated from, come sleep on my couch because I was so sure he would show up at my house. I decided I had to report the incident that occurred on the drive back, as WILLIAMS had interaction with young women trying to join the Coast Guard. If this was his level of comfort with a fellow E6 with 10 years in the Coast Guard, what would he do with somebody with no experience. At work on 05 December after discussing the issue with Petty Officer Ellen Audrey DAVIS and Petty Officer Stephanie FIGUEROA, I decided to make an official report. I made the report to now retired Chief Walter MOREY and Chief Andrew LIVINGSTON on the morning of 05 December 2022. Little did I know, I would be changing the course of my career forever. MOREY and LIVINGSTON gave the appearance they cared and supported me in my report. However, after reviewing their statements in the report of investigations (ROI), and the treatment I received after I reported made it clear that it was all smoke and mirrors. There are checklist commands use and part of that is "showing support to the victim." Every member of my chain of command was giving the illusion of support, while simultaneously trying to figure out "what I did to possibly allow WILLIAMS to behave the way he did. As if, anything I could have done would give the perception that I was ok with him stealing my underwear. This is a common theme with Coast Guard Commands; they try to blame the victim instead of just holding the perpetrator at fault.

I got the vibe the command was trying to place blame on me when I returned to the office for the first regular workday after making my report and was immediately counseled on my work performance, asked about my marital status, and instructed not to talk about my personal life with my coworkers by MOREY. MOREY also instructed me to make "amends" with DAVIS and FIGUEROA. I later learned they were upset I did not tell MOREY I confided in them about the harassment. I was not required to divulge this information to MOREY as he was not the investigator, nor did he ask me. When the investigator asked me, I did state I told DAVIS and FIGUEROA. I also included three other Coast Guard members I confided in, but these members were not questioned by the investigating officer (IO) CWO3 Brandon INGRAM. It was hard to place blame on INGRAM, he was appointed as the IO incorrectly by my then Commanding Officer Captain Ritcher TIPTON. He did not have the necessary training required by Coast Guard Policy to investigate a sexual harassment claim. This failure by TIPTON caused revictimization to me as the victim. Exhibit (F-15) (pg.395.) paragraph 1. is the investigation summary submitted by INGRAM to the Executive Officer Commander Andrea SMITH with his Preliminary Statement that WILLIAMS did violate article 134 of the UCMJ, however, WILLIAMS never received any disciplinary action specifically for this charge. Instead, he received the same disciplinary measures as I did although he was the perpetrator, and I was a victim. In INGRAM's Findings of "FACT" (pg. 396) he states "YN1 Island is legally married." This statement was incorrect as I was legally separated, but also was irrelevant to the

investigation as I was not the person that should have been investigated. He also states "YN2 Stephanie Figueroa, another recruiter at RO Hampton Roads, asserts YN1 Island told her that she told AMT1 Williams to prove he likes to smell women's underwear." However, I did not make this statement to FIGUEROA and if I had it would have been included in DAVIS' testimony. Furthermore, FIGUEROA's victim blaming statement, ALMODOVARS permission to discuss the investigations, and WILLIAMS similar statement leads me to have the reasonable suspicion that FIGUEROA is testifying on what she discussed with the perpetrator.

On January 25, 2023, I was called into a meeting with SMITH, Lieutenant Victor ALMODOVAR, and our command Master Chief Randall LAWRENCE. I was expecting to get the results of my sexual harassment report. However, I was instead removed from my special duty position, given a non-recommendation for advancement, and given administrative paperwork that was negative in nature. The ROI shows this was a blatant act of retaliation for reporting sexual harassment. SMITH states in the ROI the information used to support these disciplinary actions was only gained through the investigation into my report. TIPTON states, he only looked into my social media after receiving the report of sexual harassment. This again displays how the Coast Guard often responds to victims. They try to secretly investigate any wrongdoing by the victim no matter how small. However, in this case I had proof of his support of my TikTok @cryssiethecoastie. The Coast Guard does these investigations into the victim's career and personal life without providing the victim their article 31B rights and notifying them they are under investigation.

There were many contradictions presented by my chain of command during the initial investigation into my sexual harassment report and in the EEO investigation for retaliation. These statements show how blatant TIPTON and others were in their disregard for a sexual harassment victim. Some are listed below:

MOREY stated in Exhibit (13) (Pg. 420-421) that WILLIAMS knew why he was called into a meeting with himself and LT Victor Almodovar. If he felt he did nothing wrong, he would have no knowledge of why he was pulled into that meeting.

FIGUEROA stated in Exhibit (9) (Pg. 416-417) admits she was showing support but started out immediately victim blaming. She recalls numerous details about the conversation we had on 05 December 2022 incorrectly and are contradicted by DAVIS' statement Exhibit (10) (Pg. 418) who was also a part of the conversation.

TIPTON routed to Rear Admiral Russell DASH a memo (pg.463-465) where he summarized relevant facts to support his decision. However, these were not facts as in my testimony during the investigation specifically contradicted the statements listed in paragraph two.

- TIPTON writes in paragraph 2a. YN1 Island began the conversation by asking AMT1 if he thought females could pee with a tampon in. However, the inappropriate conversation was not started this way and the only testimony that supports this is the perpetrators.
- TIPTON writes in paragraph 2b. AMT1 disclosed he enjoyed watching women pee after being asked by YN1. This is not a factual statement. I specifically testified I did not ask this. The only testimony that supports this is the perpetrators. TIPTON also states that I stated I would look at him and laugh during training each time a female needed to go to the bathroom. This is abhorrently false, and he purposely left out key information. AMT1 got extremely anxious and

nervous after telling me about the sexual gratification he receives by watching women urinate. I was alone in the car with him in an isolated area and stated it would be an inside joke between us and I would not tell anybody. This demonstrates TIPTON's failure to understand the mindset of a member experiencing harassing behaviors.

- TIPTON writes in paragraph 2d. that both AMT1 and YN1 concur that YN1 told AMT1 to smell his wife's underwear. However, he left out that I told him he was married and if he wanted to smell somebody's underwear it should be his wife's. TIPTON stated YN2 Figueroa stated YN1 told her she told AMT1 to prove he likes to smell women's underwear, which is false and even AMT1's testimony did not corroborate this statement. YN2 Figueroa saw the text message from AMT1 stating "as requested" she also received details of the case that caused bias in her testimony from LT Victor Almodovar.
- TIPTON writes in paragraph 2g. that AMT1 apologized about "joking" about grabbing my suitcase in the in the car to retrieve my underwear. However, TIPTON writes in paragraph 2e. AMT1 asserted he was attempting to reach his water bottle. This is a blatant contradiction in testimony and furthermore admission by the perpetrator.
- TIPTON writes in 3b. "the command had preexisting sensitivity about YN1 Island's use of social media." This shows he and the rest of the command were aware of my social media advertising the Coast Guard on "TIKTOK," but it did not become an issue until after I reported sexual harassment.

TIPTON stated in his interview with the EEO investigator that he was not doing a sexual harassment investigation and instead doing an administrative investigation, but exhibit (4-B) (pg. 407) AMT1 was advised on his article 31B rights by INGRAM with a statement from INGRAM "that he/she is investigating sexual harassment."

The 4910 Exhibit (F-15B) (pg. 404) shows the incident that was to be investigated, which was on 02 December WILLIAMS "expressed to YN1 his intent to take her underwear" and "sent a picture via text showing him smelling his wife's underwear." However, numerous statements from INGRAM, MOREY, TIPTON, LIVINGSTON, DAVIS, and FIGUEROA displayed they immediately jumped to the conclusion that I did something to make WILLIAMS think it was ok to act this way. However, using a little critical thinking would conclude that if I was ok with that topic or action then I would not have reported the incident. It is apparent through the investigation that I became a suspect of alleged misconduct, however INGRAM never notified SMITH or BAKER as ordered in paragraph 6 of Exhibit (F-15b)(pg.403.)

Commander John WALSH the approving official for my evaluations states "No" when asking was WILLIAMS rated more favorably than complainant, Exhibit (F-7) (Pg.333.) However, he was originally rated more favorable including receiving a positive recommendation of advancement from LIVINGSTON. This was not changed until I amended my EEO complaint to include my evaluations where LIVINGSTON gave me a negative recommendation for advancement and included comments that I caused my own sexual harassment.

The EEO investigator noted the documents submitted in the investigation did not match oral testimony (pg.559 of ROI.)

Exhibit (F-6) (pg. 315) HENRY states "ITC Livingston was working with LT Almodovar on members EERs. Guidance came from LT Almodovar." When asked "Did you provide Chief Livingston with instruction,

guidance, or directions not to recommend Complainant for advancement?" This shows the back door dealings that happen within senior leaderships of commands regarding EEO complaints and sexual harassment. There are numerous statements from individuals testifying that ALMODOVAR recused himself fully from my evaluations, but he still gave guidance to all the individuals that were evaluating me.

Exhibit (F-5) (pg. 290) LIVINGSTON states that he also used me "not showing up to work" for my evaluations. However, there was not a single comment in my evaluations made about it. Furthermore, I did show up to work, but while I was out of office guidance was pushed out for our Holiday routine and office hours. Nobody in the office passed me the updated schedule where my scheduled day in office was moved. I had been told not to come into the office following the sexual harassment complaint, so there was no other way to find this information out. I showed up to work on the day I was originally scheduled for. It was later in the day since I had an interview with a potential applicant at 1700. I was counseled on "not showing up" by MOREY the first regular day back in the office following my sexual harassment complaint. This is a common tactic used by the Coast Guard; When they don't like that somebody made a report, they will then start nit picking things to diminish their reputation and support disciplinary action and separations from the service.

Exhibit (F-2) (pg. 230) TIPTON states "there is no harassment happening to his knowledge and if he did know about, he would not tolerate it." However, I reported via CG-4910, Exhibit (F-1E), harassment by FIGUEROA following her contacting another Coast Guard member from a different unit and stating that I filed a sexual harassment claim against WILLIAMS because he was black. That I was a "problem" because I had reported previous cases of sexual assault. I provided a recording of the member FIGUEROA stated these things to this command as evidence with my report. Nothing was done and a harassment investigation was not initiated.

Exhibit (F-2) (pg. 226) TIPTON states he used the videos, referencing my TikTok, he sent the investigator to make a determination. The videos provided were posted before I made the report of sexual harassment, some of the videos where before I was selected as a recruiter, and some where before he personally endorsed me for advancement to Chief Warrant Officer. He followed me on TikTok since July 2022 and the videos "coincidentally" became an issue following my report of sexual harassment.

Upon being retaliated against I filed an ARTICLE 138 against TIPTON to Rear Admiral Russel DASH, who is the Commander of Personnel Services. I was reporting TIPTONs complete mishandling of my sexual harassment report. However, DASH refused to take action on my ARTICLE 138 unless I retracted my EEO complaint. This did not make sense to me as my EEO complaint was for retaliation and my article 138 was for how TIPTON did not follow policy in conducting the investigation that led to retaliation. Furthermore, there is no policy saying DASH could not have taken action and refusal to take action could be seen as an act of retaliation. I have included a copy of the ARTICLE 138 I submitted, TIPTONs response, and DASHs refusal to make a decision.

In accordance with Chapter 3.10, U.S. Coast Guard Civil Rights Manual COMDTINST M5350.4E, TIPTON should have provided me a written acknowledgment of receipt of allegations, initiated an AHHI investigation, notified the Civil Rights Service provider or Civil rights Director, and Coast Guard Investigation Services. He should also have appointed an IO, who has completed DHS/Coast Guard Training in investigating allegations of harassing behavior within the past three years and completed a findings and outcome memo. TIPTON failed to do all of these actions, which puts him in a violation of a

direct order or regulation Article 92 of the UCMJ. DASH is aware of this and made the choice not to hold him accountable for his actions. Furthermore, ALMODOVAR is also in violation of the same article of the UCMJ for briefing my entire unit on my report and giving permission to discuss it, which compromised the entire investigation. He was not held accountable for his actions and is still assigned to Coast Guard Recruiting. MOREY, LIVINGSTON, DAVIS, and FIGUEROA were allowed to make victim blaming statements and were allowed to compromise an entire investigation. They were never held accountable. Instead, FIGUEROA was advanced, MOREY honorably retired, and LIVINGSTON was given an assignment as the permanent Recruiter in Charge of the Recruiting Office in San Antonio, Texas. Lastly, DASH's failure to take any action during these investigations has gone unnoticed. He oversees the entire Personnel services, which includes advancements, evaluations, accessions, and separations; but he has shown his inability to lead the Coast Guard in a direction to prevent Sexual Harassment and hold perpetrators and those who promote toxic work climates accountable.

In conclusion I would like to make the following recommendations:

- Relieve Rear Admiral Russel Dash and Captain Ritcher Tipton immediately to demonstrate to other unit Commanders that there will be a zero tolerance for those who display inaction when receiving reports of sexual misconduct or retaliation.
- Create a zero-tolerance policy for the Coast Guard to hold commands responsible for not holding perpetrators accountable and for not following Commandant Instruction when responding to reports.
- Prevent Commands from evaluating members, who have open EEO complaints against them.
- Implement a policy to waive Evaluations for members who have experienced sexual harassment or assault for one year.
- Mandate the Commandant create a process in which previous cases can be submitted to be reviewed by an outside agency to identify Commands who did not take appropriate action and remove disciplinary actions implemented on victims.
- Mandate Coast Guard Recruiting Offices answer honestly when asked by applicants about the statistics regarding sexual misconduct in the Coast Guard. (Currently recruiters are ordered to only reply that the Coast Guard has a Zero Tolerance Policy.)

You could interview a thousand victims of sexual misconduct in the Coast Guard. There will be one common denominator in which the victim gets justice, nothing is done, or worse the victim is punished in response to reporting. That common denominator is the issue lying within command discretion. The Coast Guards mishandling of sexual harassment came to light during the investigation into Operation Fouled anchor. This investigation uncovered numerous coverups regarding sexual assault and harassment at the Coast Guard Academy. Before I end my testimony, I want to point out, these members that assaulted and harassed others and were protected are still in the Coast Guard today. These are the Flag officers and Commanding Officers we are supposed to trust to make decisions regarding our reports. I want to condemn those that continue the culture that allows assaults and harassments to take place Rear Admiral Russell Dash, Captain Ritcher Tipton, Lieutenant Victor Almodovar, Chief Warrant Officer Brandon Ingram, Retired Chief Walter Morey, Chief Andrew Livingston, Petty Officer Ellen "Audrey" Davis, and Petty Officer Stephanie Figueroa. Those nine members and those like them are the reason members like Petty Officer Matthew Williams felt comfortable sexual harassing me and the reason numerous members refuse to make reports of sexual assault and harassment. I respectfully

request this committee to not only demand change for the future of the Coast Guard, but to demand that previous victims get the justice they deserve.

Recalling and reliving these events is difficult at any stage of trauma recovery. It pains me that seven years into my retirement, I am before the Senate telling my story that started 30 years ago. After serving 22 years on active duty with the United States Coast Guard, my testimony will give brief recollections of mine and other's traumas. It is my hope that I and this panel will be the last to publicly be re traumatized from our time in the Coast Guard. A Coast Guard we all still love and bleed blue for. We all stand united, Academy Cadets, enlisted, officers, and retirees, we want to make our Coast Guard the best it can be. I am Tina D. Owen and this is our story.

At the young age of 17, off to college I went but quickly being reminded that I didn't get the anticipated sports scholarship, and I was working three jobs while going to classes. My college counselor said I needed a plan because staying at college wasn't going to work. I discovered the Coast Guard in a magazine article and made the call.... G.I. Bill, driving boats, drug interdiction, sign me up! You need a parent's signature at 17, my recruiter advised, and not having the best home life, that wasn't an option, so he had me come in to do the paperwork when I turned 18 and off to boot camp I went a month later! I told the recruiter I would see him after boot camp and that I couldn't wait to be driving the boats and becoming a Boatswain's Mate.

During boot camp, I visited the medical clinic because of stomach pains I was having. The doctor ordered a series of x-rays to help determine the cause of my pain. While in the x-ray room the Health Service Technician had me undressed completely with the gown open in front. I will stop there with how the rest of the story goes. I returned to training and didn't tell anyone what happened because I didn't have another plan, the Coast Guard was my plan and I wanted to be a part of this organization.

Off to Governor's Island I go after boot camp and although I wasn't driving boats yet, my Chief allowed me to go on the 378' cutter that was tied up just across the street from our shop. I was well on my way to being a Boatswain's Mate (BM) until the new Chief shows up for duty. He announced that he was a Fire Control Technician, had never worked with women and didn't want to work with women. When I asked him to sign off on my chit to be put on the BM 'A' school list, he refused to sign it and said no woman was going to be a BM in his Coast Guard. He gave me the choice of Storekeeper, Yeoman, or Health Service Technician. Woman had been in the Coast Guard for 20 years at this point and we were indeed allowed to do all jobs. Again, not having a plan outside of the CG, I submitted to putting my name on the Health Service Technician (HS) list. This same Chief would ask the women while we were at lunch, who in the galley were we sleeping with. I eventually got a mutual transfer to VA and a wonderful Chief at the new unit had the FTC investigated and I was promised I would never have to serve near him again, and I never did.

Upon graduating from HS 'A' school, I get stationed at the Cape May clinic. During my rotation in the radiology department, I expressed to the Chief that I was concerned I may be having an allergic reaction to the dyes we used to process the films because every time I worked in the space, I was having difficulty breathing. He asked me if I had x-rays while at boot camp and I replied, Yes. He pulled my file and said, oh you were one of HS1's victims, don't worry he is in the brig so you can just be over it. My first panic attacks began that moment as all of the inappropriateness of his x-rays came flooding back. I was able to express how the Chief's comments affected me years later and the Chief wrote me an apology letter for his actions. I also asked the assignment officer years later if he knew about the HS1 going to the brig for taking hundreds of inappropriate x-rays and he was not aware of the incidents and assured me he wouldn't have sent me to that clinic if he would have known.

While serving at the clinic, I was selected as the female HS to go onboard the CGC Eagle, where boot camp was held for six weeks out to sea. During this time I was having some health issues that we coordinated care in South America. After being seen by the doctor, it was determined that I was possibly having a miscarriage due to the amount of blood loss. I requested to be medivac back home and was denied by the physician that was onboard and he demanded I continue doing my job and if I didn't he was going to medically discharge me for mental health issues when we got back to Cape May. Upon return to the clinic, I began therapy and the physician was transferred to another unit.

Becoming an HS was a blessing in disguise as I was always in a position to allow people to have a safe space to talk, to confide in someone, to know they were being heard even though they couldn't tell anyone else. When I was named Enlisted Person of the Year for the 5th District, I was also endorsed to attend Officer Candidate School. I thought for sure I could make a difference as an officer.

Inducted as one of the first five women that formed the Coast Guard Women's Leadership Association, this is where I realized there wasn't much of a cultural difference from the enlisted to officer side, so survival mode is what I went into. After leaving headquarters and the original Women's Leadership group, I had informal Women's Leadership groups for the duration of my 22 year career.

You were all heard! All of the women and men that confided in me as a Health Service Technician, Clinic Administrator, Work-Life Supervisor, or just as a shipmate, you were heard loud and clear and I am grateful to have been that safe space for you all. Senate members I am here to tell you they were raped, they were threatened, they were kicked, things thrown at them from across the room, hit by said objects, made a public mockery, they had inappropriate EKGs taken, they found hidden cameras in the bathroom, they discovered a drunk shipmate

crawling in female racks on the cutter and was groping them, they all just wanted to serve their Coast Guard in a safe space, but they were violated.

I leave you with one last incident that occurred while I was on terminal leave prior to retiring. On my front porch is where I sat as the Chief Warrant Officer read me my rights and advised me that I was under investigation for an inappropriate relationship with the Civil Rights Officer who was a Chief. The investigation found him guilty of making false statements about me and four other women on the base. False statements to his supervisor that he was meeting all of us ladies and had a relationship with us... of which he did NOT. An obvious stalker and predator, he was afforded the opportunity to either get stationed in Alaska or retire. Thankfully he retired but when asked for him to be charged with sexual harassment, I was advised it didn't meet the criteria.

Today I want us all to release these pains and ask Senate to take this matter to a safe space and allow victims to see actions verse words. I have received several different treatments with the Veteran's Administration hospital and private practices that have more holistic approaches to healing from PTSD. In addition to all the wonderful recommendations that were made by the first panel of survivors, I would ask that you take into consideration future laws that would allow ALL veterans with PTSD to have access to medical cannabis regardless of what state they live in.

Dear Senator Blumenthal,

My name is Meghan Klement and I am Coast Guard veteran and Military Sexual Assault survivor. I grew up in a small town in Washington with a family who loves America. My father and brother served our country admirably, along with my mother who cared for Veterans her entire career. I joined the Coast Guard full of hope and admiration at the age of 19. I was ready to make my family and my country proud. I served from September of 2012 until my medical discharge in May of 2015. It was a hard three years that made my innocence flee abruptly.

The eight weeks I spent in boot camp in Cape May, New Jersey were difficult but incredibly rewarding. I left there feeling so proud of myself and ready to serve my country dutifully. My first duty station was Small Boat Station Neah Bay. It is an isolated unit on the very northwest tip of Washington state on an Indian Reservation.

The culture of my unit was something I wasn't ready for. I was anxious and excited to start my job and to learn. It was there I met my Boatswains First Class Petty Officer that would eventually sexually harass me. I started experiencing joint issues after every time I went underway. My knees would swell and turn purple. I had mentioned I was in a lot of pain after going underway and in short was told to suck it up. I was fearful of speaking up, but my pain continued to get worse. Eventually they agreed to send me to physical therapy and I was so embarrassed being so new and not useful in the ways the crew needed me to be. I had to drive two hours in each direction to go to each appointment and the cost for gas was difficult on E-2 pay. My Commanding Officer (CO), Chief Warrant Officer, called me into her office one morning. She was very friendly and made me feel like she was a friend I could trust. She asked me if I actually wanted to be in the Coast Guard. I reassured her that I did in fact want to be in the Coast Guard, and I wanted to make a difference. Her questions made me feel as if being injured meant I wasn't actually wanting to be in the fleet. I later found out I was having auto immune issues that were causing my extreme pain. My CO then told me she was going to send me to Air Station Port Angeles on Temporary Duty Assignment (TDY) orders. She had told me this was for the purpose of me attending my physical therapy appointments easier and that I could marry my husband and live outside the barracks.

I reported to Air Station Port Angeles on March 5th, 2013. They put me in the Storekeeper warehouse. On March 6th I met my assaulter. He was a retired Senior Chief who was a contracted IT worker for the base. I was sent to his office to have my profile transferred and set up for my new unit. I felt hopeful for my fresh start

and the opportunities that the base offered. My assaulter was around the same age as my dad. He was very friendly and wanted to talk to me quite a bit. I assumed he was wanting to take me under his wing and help me learn the ropes of my new unit. The first time I went to his office on March 6th, 2013 he put his hand on my knee and rubbed it. I felt at the time it was a little odd but didn't want to make any assumptions.

Within a week of being at Port Angeles I was called into the Lieutenant Commander's office along with my Command Master Chief and my supervisor, Chief Warrant Officer. It was there that they slid a memorandum across the desk that read "intent to discharge for fraudulent enlistment; abnormal flat feet" (see attached 1). I was speechless. I had no idea how I could have fraudulently enlisted. The Lieutenant Commander said to me "we want you to go home tonight and read this over. We will have you in here to sign it tomorrow and have you discharged in about 30 days". My friend who worked in the clinic informed me that the Lieutenant Commander was going through my medical files. He had no right to do so. I found a Chief on base that I could trust and he taught me how to protect myself. I first called a JAG. He wrote up a statement proving I didn't in fact fraudulently enlist. (See attached 2). I was also told I had the right to call a Congressman. But I was told that if I did call a Congressman that I shouldn't tell anyone because the command would be very angry with me. It is widely known how much you will be disliked if you do so. I had to weigh out being disliked with being discharged for fraudulent enlistment.

Congresswoman Jaime Herrera Beutler told me that the Coast Guard dropped my charges. I waited on base for weeks for someone to speak to me. No one ever came to tell me that the charges against me were dropped. I told my health services Doc what I had done. The news quickly spread and my supervisor, my CWO, was extremely upset with me. He came into the warehouse and screamed at me in front of my entire shop calling me "stupid" and "immature" for calling a Congresswoman. Unfortunately, my assaulter found out about my charges from the command and how much trouble I was in with them. After then he became more aggressive.

One afternoon I had to go into my assaulters office to get a new Common Access Card (CAC) card reader. He shut his office door behind me. He had me sit at the desk in the corner of the room next to his. There were no windows, other than the window on the door. He kept those blinds drawn while I was in there. Therefore no one could see in. As he was explaining to me how to fix my computer, he ran his hands up my thigh and continued to rub them. He asked me very personal questions about my husband. I tried removing his hands from my legs and got up to leave. He quickly jumped up from his chair and put himself between me and the door. Then he said to me "you have to give me a hug since I helped you". I let him hug me in hopes that he would allow me to then leave his office. He held me as tight as he could

against his body and put his head down near my neck and rested it on my hair. He was repeatedly telling me "You're such pretty girl". He was running his hands all along my body and squeezing me. After a minute or more he finally let me leave his office. He then insisted on walking me back to my office. He took me out back behind the building and put his hand on my very lower back at the top of my buttocks and escorted me to my office telling me he was being a gentleman.

This behavior continued over the course of three months. I avoided him as much as possible but my SK1 (Storekeeper First Class Petty Officer) had me frequently running to his office on errands. At the same time this was happening, I was receiving text messages from my prior BM1 (Boatswains Mate First Class Petty Officer) that were sexual in nature and were a form of harassment. My command was talking about sending me back to Neah Bay, and If I returned I would work under the BM1 who was now showing sexual interest in me. I informed my SK1 that I did not feel safe going back to Neah Bay. So, she brought me to my Command Master Chief's office and I informed him as well that I did not feel safe returning there. He then said to me "I am here to give you a reality check. If Neah Bay needs our support, then that's where you will go". I left that office feeling completely defeated and alone. Knowing that if I returned to Neah Bay this BM1 would be in charge of my evaluations and whether I could take any leave. I had informed my SK3 of the messages I had been receiving and how uncomfortable they made me. He had not received training on how to deal with this situation. He informed me that it wasn't a big deal. In turn, he went to BM1 and his wife and informed them that I showed him the messages. I then received very long messages from my BM1 about the type of person he thought I was. Telling me I was disgusting, and ugly. Saying he would never be interested in someone like me. He informed me that he was disappointed in me, and that he thought I was "cooler". It was devastating knowing I was going to be sent back to work for this person and no one in my command would listen to me.

My assaulter continued to pursue me any opportunity he could. I had asked many other people about him and they all just told me "that's just who he is. He's an old perv". Everyone was aware of the type of person he was. MK2 Cool (Machinery Technician Second Class Petty Officer) started to see what was happening. He picked up on the interest this man had in me. He told me if I didn't tell anyone he would. I'm very thankful for my MK2 Cool for realizing what was happening to me. He saw the signs when no one else did. I came to work the morning after my conversation with my MK2 Cool and my CWO asked me to come speak to him outside. He then brought me out back and around the corner where no one could see or hear us. He asked me "Did (my assaulter) shut you in his office and position himself between you and the door?" I responded and said "Yes sir, it's been going on for months. This is also going on." I showed him the messages I was receiving from BM1. My CWO responded to me by saying "Okay, I want you to think about these men and their careers. They

could lose their jobs over this, and you could ruin their lives. And then CGIS (Coast Guard Investigative Services) is going to show up and make you out to be a liar. No one will believe you. Do you want that? I want you to think about all of this before you decide to tell anyone else”.

Again, I was completely devastated and felt utterly alone and unprotected. I returned to my shop very distraught. I had a close friend who noticed, and I told her everything. She brought me over to an adjacent building where a female Chief worked. I told her everything.

A few days later CGIS showed up. I was very nervous to speak to them because the only thing I knew was that they wouldn't believe me. I was encouraged to speak and told that wasn't true. So, I decided to give an interview. I was in a long board room sitting next to two male CGIS agents. The Chief who helped me come forward sat across the table and against the wall. The agents asked mostly routine questions, but it took a turn part of the way through where they then started questioning my character. Then they made me raise my left hand and use it to show them exactly where he had touched me. I remember sobbing uncontrollably as they asked me to do this. I didn't know that I had the option to say no to these men. As I touched myself, they discredited me. Told me that “if your hand just went up your thigh a little farther, then you would have been assaulted”. They made me tell them how many seconds he touched me in each place. The agents then informed me “this is only harassment and it's not that big of a deal”. I became frantic that they weren't understanding, and I told them that this same man did in fact try and touch the female Chief sitting across the table from me, as well as my friends who worked in the clinic. I returned to work, and I waited. I knew that with assault cases you were to be moved units. I waited weeks and no one spoke to me about it. I had to continue to work with my assaulter and see him almost daily. It wasn't until one afternoon I was walking by him and he shook his head with disgust while looking at me. It was then that I realized no one was here to protect me but myself. So, I asked a female Chief if she would help me get out of the Coast Guard or send me somewhere close to home. I told her I couldn't work there anymore, and that I was scared. She somehow was able to get me orders back to Portland, Oregon.

Before I left Air Station Port Angeles I had to check out with my command. My Command Master Chief Moan and Executive Officer (XO). They both told me “When you leave here, we don't really think it's a good idea that you talk about what happened. We don't want this to follow you around and ruin your reputation”. So, when I reported to my unit in Portland I was under the impression that I wasn't allowed to tell anyone about what I had just been through. There was a new Chief on base who became the non-rate liaison. Her job was to form relationships with the

lower enlisted members and help bridge the gap between them and the command. She was to offer support and guidance. She coincidentally had worked in the recruiting office that I joined through. Once she realized I was on base she found me. She asked me why the heck I was back home and I had informed her "I'm not really allowed to speak about it. My command told me I couldn't when I checked out". She then informed me that that wasn't okay. I told her everything along with my new Commanding Officer, Captain Ropp. Those two continued to fight for me for the following two years, but to no avail. (see attached 3)

After being at Portland for a few months I still wasn't "getting better" in their eyes because I couldn't work in the Communications Room. It was a similar room to the one I had been assaulted in. So, they decided to send me up to the Naval hospital in Bremerton, Washington for a psychiatric evaluation. I wasn't in the psychiatrist's office for more than five minutes before she told me our meeting was a waste of her time. I had informed her that I was in routine therapy where I was diagnosed with PTSD, depression, and anxiety from my work environment. She told me all my responses were completely normal for someone who was freshly assaulted. Station Portland then didn't know what to do with me so they sent me to Marine Safety Unit (MSU) Portland so I could work in the Storekeeper shop where I could continue to learn the rating.

In late 2013, after being stationed at MSU Portland, I showed up to work and there were a lot of Chiefs on base from various units. I was later told that the Pacific Area Admiral had heard my story and sent his Master Chief to hear it directly from me. Later, I was put into a room with my Station Chief, my Command Chief, and District 13 Master Chief. Master Chief led the conversation. He informed me that he had looked through the investigation reports. He then asked me "did you know that you weren't actually assaulted? You were only harassed". I was shocked that someone who had literally never spoken to me before seemingly thought he was a professional on my assault case. I asked him "So someone touching you unwantedly over the course of three months is only harassment to you?" He had told me that he was just going by what the reports said. It was then I realized that my investigation was a sham. Master Chief then proceeded to tell me he would make sure BM1 couldn't make Chief, but that there was nothing he could do about my assaulter because he was now a civilian. I continued to tell him that that wasn't good enough for me. I left that conversation feeling helpless again. Realizing that even my highest senior enlisted member in my District wasn't going to help me. Instead, he belittled my assaults and dismissed me. Master Chief ended up becoming the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard, with no skill set on helping assault victims.

In the latter part of 2013, I became pregnant with my son. I had been in an immense amount of pain in my pelvis. At a routine checkup, when I was seven months pregnant, the doctor realized I was in more pain than normal. She gave me a pelvic exam and asked if I had been a victim of sexual assault. I informed her that I had. That is when I found out that I had internal damage. My body went into attack mode like I was being assaulted and never relaxed. I was informed my body did this from my assaults and my brain telling my body that my environment wasn't safe. I had to continue to get internal physical therapy for two years as well as desensitization therapy.

In early 2015 I found out my medical board was coming soon, so my days in the Coast Guard were numbered. We had an all hands meeting one morning with the D13 Admiral. He stood up in front of everyone and told them all how he had a zero-tolerance policy for sexual assault and harassment and that their reporting system was better than ever. When it was time for questions and concerns with the Admiral, I raised my hand. I informed the Admiral that his reporting process was in fact broken. I told him that not a single person had called to check in on me or give me any updates. I told him that my investigation had been ongoing for two years, and that both men still worked for him. He was stunned and didn't have much to say. After the all hands meeting, his Master Chief found me and told me he wanted to talk to me in my Command Chief's office. In that meeting, the Master Chief informed me that he would make it his priority to message me with updates and keep me informed. I never once heard from the man.

I was discharged May 15th 2015. I had to receive countless hours of therapy, psychological and physical, to help maintain my health. I deal with PTSD and anxiety in my daily life. It is a daily battle for me still to this day. I have nightmares, panic attacks, flashbacks, and trouble enjoying sex. The traumas that happened to me have affected me physically and emotionally throughout my daily life. The assaults and harassment were one trauma, but the way the Coast Guard handled them is an entirely other trauma in itself.

Since releasing my survivor story, I have received over 50 messages from current and past coasties who have dealt with sexual assault and harassment. Very few of those people actually saw any justice. We all join as patriots, and so many of us leave the service hating our government and deeply mistrusting it. That is because we are silenced, discredited, ran through the mud, and beaten down. The ones who promise to protect us seemingly are more concerned with protecting their careers and doing whatever is necessary to move through the ranks. It was revictimizing for me to film this storyteller session and then find out that the Coast Guard did not want to release it. I again felt silenced.

I have submitted a FOIA request in hopes of finally seeing my full assault case in its entirety. I submitted it officially May 29th, 2024. As of today, August 2, 2024 I still have not received my FOIA request. After submitting my request, I was contacted by the D13 SARC and offered a "healing opportunity". She was wanting me to fill out what she referred to as an "intake" form. Later I found out she was wanting me to fill out a 2012 version the 6095 form. She admitted that she would annotate it for me. Therefore my case was never dealt with correctly from the beginning.

We must do our best to help change the sexual assault culture within the Coast Guard. My story is far too common amongst service members. No more silencing survivors. Things need to change, and they need to change now.

Thank you for your time and for giving me and so many others a voice.

Very Respectfully,

Meghan L. Klement

My name is Chief Warrant Officer Julian Bell, and I am standing before you today as a survivor of Military Sexual Assault. I enlisted in the Coast Guard in July of 2003, and I have proudly served for over 21 years.

My journey began with excitement and purpose as I reported to my first assignment aboard the CG Cutter CHASE, homeported in San Diego, California. At just 19 years old, I was eager and ready to serve my country. However, the reality of life onboard was starkly different from what I had expected. From day one, I witnessed a toxic environment where shipmates who struggled with mental health or performance were subjected to harassment and hazing. The prevailing command climate discouraged any cries for help, leading to open ridicule and persecution instead. Violence, inappropriate relationships, and assault became the unsettling norms among my shipmates.

In 2004, during a harrowing incident in Navy barracks, I was drugged and raped by a fellow Coast Guard shipmate and two Navy sailors. After that traumatic experience, I felt isolated and alone. I worked directly with the person who assaulted me but felt that speaking up would only lead to further ostracization. Thus, I chose silence, believing it was my only option.

Despite the trauma, I pressed on in my career. By 2016, I had reached the rank of Chief Warrant Officer and was assigned to Sector Houston-Galveston. It was here that I encountered a pivotal moment in my life. As part of our leadership training at the Coast Guard Academy, I attended an eight-hour seminar on Sexual Assault Prevention and Response. It was during this training that I met Shannon Norenberg, the Academy's Sexual Assault Response Coordinator. With her guidance, I finally found the courage to come forward and report my assault, even though twelve years had passed since that dreadful day.

Confronting my past was not easy—the memories resurfaced, and the pain returned. I submitted to an investigation by CGIS, hoping for justice. However, the outcome was disheartening. My assailant was believed, and little hope was offered for accountability. After several agonizing months, the investigation was closed.

To make matters worse, the trauma from my assault manifested in serious physical health issues, including cancer in my pelvis. Thankfully, I was able to find medical care and recover, but by then, my physical and mental well-being were in disarray. In early 2022, I reached a significant milestone in my healing journey by publicly sharing my story through my podcast, *Sailor's Disgrace*, providing a space for others to voice their experiences. Each shared story has been cathartic for me and has empowered fellow survivors to navigate their own healing paths.

However, during the summer of 2023, when CNN released their report, *Operation Fouled Anchor*, detailing a shameful history of sexual assault and harassment at the Coast Guard Academy, I was both saddened and motivated. Rather than feeling defeated, I felt emboldened to take action to fight against the culture of coverup that was taught at the Academy. I became a Sexual Assault Victim Advocate, eager to effect change. I shared my story with senior officials in the Coast Guard at the Executive Summit in February 2024, and attendees expressed that my account would trigger necessary change.

Yet, soon after, I faced another setback. During the training videos we recorded for Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month, concerns arose about their release. The fear of tarnishing the Coast Guard's image halted the release of my story and those of my fellow survivors. We had hoped our voices would be heard, but instead, we felt our experiences were being silenced.

Additionally, I was in the midst of a second investigation into my case, which had been reopened due to efforts from CGIS leadership. However, I soon discovered troubling issues, including missing evidence from my initial interview, leading to doubt about the thoroughness of the investigation. I was left feeling as if my quest for justice was being undermined yet again, and ultimately, no administrative action was taken against my assailant who was allowed to retire shortly after closing the investigation. To further exacerbate the hopelessness of my case, CGIS contacted me weeks afterwards investigating an unrelated hazing incident during my time on the CHASE. It was obvious their intent was to implicate me in something that would bring discredit to my name and story.

With each step, it became clearer that our systems are broken. While I have served honorably for over two decades and love the Coast Guard, I have witnessed firsthand the failures within our systems to protect and support those in vulnerable situations. Now, we must ensure that when our members call for help, they receive compassionate and honest responses that prioritize their healing.

The stories of survivors like myself are far too common, and we have a responsibility to change the narrative. We must create an environment rooted in care and transparency, where survivors are encouraged to speak out, and their stories lead to meaningful action. We need to transform our culture into one that respects, supports, and empowers those who have faced unimaginable traumas.

It's time for us to stop silencing survivors. We must learn from their experiences and honor their strength. We have let down our brothers and sisters for too long, but now is the time for action. Together, we can pave the way for a brighter, safer future within our ranks. Thank you.



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5041
August 5, 2024

Addendum to Letter Submitted May 10, 2024

United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Blumenthal:

I respectfully submit this addendum to my letter submitted to the Committee on May 10, 2024. Since I submitted that letter, the Coast Guard continued investigating me in matters unrelated to my assault to discredit my character and my sexual assault case. In mid-May of this year, a few weeks after my assault investigation was formally closed and my assailant was allowed to retire with no consequence, Coast Guard Investigative Services (CGIS) agents from the Los Angeles office contacted me to investigate a hazing incident that I mentioned in an episode of my podcast. The agents were adamant that I appear in their office to give a formal statement in this matter. I asked why they were investigating a hazing incident mentioned in my podcast and why they were listening to it after my assault investigation closed and not before. I did not receive a response.

Eventually a telephone interview was scheduled, and I willfully submitted. I was not involved in this incident but witnessed other members of the crew onboard the CHASE hazing someone in a berthing area. The agents kept asking what I did as I walked by the berthing area implying that I was somehow involved. I stopped the interview several times and said that hazing was rampant during my time on the CHASE (2003-2005) and if I were to recall every incident, they would be extremely busy investigating countless cases.

As of this writing, I have yet to hear back on how their investigation of this hazing incident progressed or if it was closed. It is my strong belief that CGIS was using this investigation as a retaliatory tool after my case went public and after my involvement with your office was known.

I would also like to highlight that I recently found out CGIS attempted to contact a former shipmate and friend from the CHASE. This person is a struggling drug addict and was discharged from service for drug use about 15 years ago. I let the agents on my assault case know that this person had no knowledge of my assault and that he was not a reliable source of information due to his addiction issues. My friend reached out to me in May and told me that CGIS tried contacting him directly and even went as far as reaching out to his sister, whom he has been estranged for the past 12 years. CGIS was trying to implicate me and smear my name with a person battling drug addiction even though I was open about our friendship and perfectly clear that he did not want to be contacted.

Again, I thank you for your time and for your continued efforts in the ongoing improvements to our service and its culture.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Julian E. Bell", written in a cursive style.

J. E. BELL, Chief Warrant Officer 4
U.S. Coast Guard

A PERVERSIVE PROBLEM

VOICES OF COAST GUARD SEXUAL ASSAULT AND HARASSMENT SURVIVORS



NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

Every day, thousands of Americans put on a U.S. Coast Guard uniform, and with "Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty" they protect this nation. Their service, like the service of all military members, represents this nation's strongest ideals and highest calling. In the Coast Guard, however, that commitment has been undermined by a culture that has failed to prioritize the safety and well-being of all its members. This moral failure has been allowed to spread, hidden behind closed proceedings, honorable discharges, and a look-the-other-way mentality.

The Coast Guard has recently, and rightfully, faced scrutiny for its high-profile failure to appropriately address sexual misconduct at the Academy and its subsequent cover-up of that failure. This Subcommittee has spent months digging into those facts and continues to do so. This report tells a critical but different part of that story. It tells the story of a Coast Guard whose cultural failings around sexual misconduct are not limited to the Academy, using the very words of the more than 80 brave whistleblowers—current and former Academy cadets and enlisted members alike—who have come forward to the Subcommittee to share their experiences.

The voices of these whistleblowers make clear that sexual assault and sexual harassment in the Coast Guard are fleet-wide problems, impacting enlisted members and officers just as pervasively as cadets. For far too long, Coast Guard survivors have felt unheard and unseen. They have been brushed aside and silenced. This report seeks to redress that harm.

Elevating survivors' voices—while essential—is not a solution to the pervasive and persistent mistreatment they have faced. The Coast Guard clearly needs to do more, starting with meaningful accountability for individuals responsible for committing prohibited acts or concealing them. Our continuing investigation is likely to provide evidence that will assist and motivate the Coast Guard to impose discipline. It is imperative that the Coast Guard uses all means available to hold accountable both individual perpetrators and the leadership that covered up their wrongdoing. And it is equally essential that the Coast Guard begins to leverage meaningful, swift, and consistent accountability against present and future perpetrators. The culture will not change until the Coast Guard makes clear that sexual assault and harassment will not be tolerated.

Nor will the culture change until the Coast Guard makes a meaningful commitment to transparency. I am deeply disappointed by the Coast Guard's responses to this Subcommittee's requests for critically necessary information. Despite repeatedly and publicly claiming a commitment to transparency, the organization has often resisted constructive responses. Such repeated opposition to disclosure has made us wonder whether the Coast Guard is, once again, attempting to escape Congressional scrutiny. Until the Coast Guard is willing to fully reckon with its failures, it will remain tethered to them.

In her testimony before this Subcommittee, the Commandant of the Coast Guard, Admiral Linda Fagan, said, "[w]e will become an organization that is intolerant of harmful behaviors, that is myopically focused on transparency and creates accountability for every member of the organization." But reform requires that the Coast Guard stand behind its rhetoric and make the hard choices necessary to redress harms of the past and build a better future. I hope Admiral Fagan will heighten and intensify such efforts. The whistleblowers cited in this report have shown the courage to come forward—and now their leaders must show similar conviction in creating a culture where all are safe and valued.

This Subcommittee's inquiry remains active, and we pledge to continue investigating what has gone wrong to identify what needs to be done to prevent future harm. I would like to thank Ranking Member Ron Johnson for his support in this ongoing inquiry. This issue deserves the robust, bipartisan oversight that we must continue to provide.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael Obama Ref".

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Executive Summary

The following Majority Staff Report of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations ("PSI" or "the Subcommittee") presents accounts received from the more than 80 whistleblowers who have come forward to report their personal experiences in the U.S. Coast Guard and at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy (the "Academy") since September 2023, when the Subcommittee initiated a bipartisan inquiry into the Coast Guard, and reports that it mishandled dozens of sexual misconduct cases at the Academy and subsequently withheld findings from its investigation into those cases from Congress.¹ These stories, spanning from the 1970s through the 2020s, depict systemic failures at the Coast Guard Academy and in the Coast Guard that continue to this day.

Due to the need to protect whistleblower confidentiality, names and identifying details have been removed where whistleblowers have not previously come forward publicly. However, the common elements of these accounts speak to the greater truth of the Coast Guard's failure not only to protect personnel from sexual assault and harassment, but to treat victims with dignity and respect. Their stories detail the Coast Guard's systemic inability to address or prevent sexual assault and harassment, including a culture of silencing, retaliation, and failed accountability.

Survivor stories received by the Subcommittee and presented in this report include the following common themes:

A culture of ostracization, shaming, and disbelief deterred victims of abuse from reporting. An Academy cadet recounted the reaction of her classmates after making an unrestricted² report of sexual assault in 2020:

¹ Letter from Chair Richard Blumenthal and Ranking Member Ron Johnson, Permanent Subcomm. on Investigations, to Admiral Linda Fagan, Commandant of U.S. Coast Guard, Sept. 12, 2023, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023-09-12-Blumenthal-and-Johnson-Letter-to-USCG-re-Operation-Fouled-Anchor.pdf>.

² Survivors can choose between making a restricted or unrestricted report of sexual assault. Restricted reports are not shared with law enforcement or the survivor's chain of command, while unrestricted reports are disclosed to Coast Guard Investigative Services (Coast Guard law enforcement) and the survivor's chain of command. See Sexual Assault Prevention, Response, & Recovery (SAPRR) Program CG-1K4, U.S. Coast Guard, <https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/Assistant-Commandant-for-Human-Resources-CG-1/Health-Safety-and-Work-Life-CG-11/Sexual-Assault-Prevention-Response-and-Recovery-Program/>.

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.

Leadership discouraged victims of abuse from reporting. A cadet who made a written report of her sexual assault was allegedly discouraged from pursuing an investigation by Coast Guard lawyers:

They told me I could pursue an investigation; however, that would impact my studies, my ability to graduate that spring, and my first duty station . . . I felt that two officers telling me to focus on my studies and my career is what I needed to do.

In another account, after learning that she had experienced months of sexual misconduct, a superior allegedly told an enlisted whistleblower:

Okay, I want you to think about these men and their careers. They could lose their jobs over this, and you could ruin their lives. And then CGIS (Coast Guard Investigative Services) is going to show up and make you out to be a liar. No one will believe you. Do you want that? I want you to think about all of this before you decide to tell anyone else.

Fear of punishment for collateral misconduct deterred victims of abuse from reporting. One whistleblower shared that, as a cadet in the 2010s, the threat of discipline for unrelated misconduct was used to keep her from reporting repeated sexual assaults by the same perpetrator for a year. She said:

He blackmailed me, using his position over me and the fact that I drank underage to get me to have sex with him. He knew that I would get into more trouble for underage drinking than he would for blackmailing me for sex. He was right. . . .

Investigations into abuse allegations were retraumatizing and failed to enforce meaningful accountability for perpetrators. The Coast Guard's failure to initiate criminal processes against assailants, and instead resolve cases administratively, was cited by both Academy and fleet whistleblowers as deeply harmful. One active duty whistleblower described the disappointment and betrayal she felt when the Coast Guard failed to leverage meaningful accountability against her perpetrator:

During the investigation, they found that this was a pattern of behavior for him, even at previous units. He had never been held accountable. . . . This man was a sexual predator, and got off virtually Scot free because he was a "hero," and a good ole boy.

Victims of abuse faced career retaliation after reporting. A whistleblower shared that it took years to correct an "inaccurate and degrading evaluation" made by her supervisor, who was sexually harassing her. That same supervisor, against whom the whistleblower had lodged an official complaint, was later on the whistleblower's promotion board. The whistleblower was reportedly passed over for the promotion and did not retire at the rank she could have achieved.

Victims of abuse received inadequate medical care and services. An active duty whistleblower was assaulted three months after graduating from boot camp, more than 20 years ago. The whistleblower recently reached out to the Coast Guard Medical Office for help dealing with the trauma:

*. . . the doctor just simply asked me what kind of medication do you want.
 . . . I have no idea?!?! I wasn't reaching out for medication, I was reaching out to talk to someone, to tell someone. To be heard by someone.*

The flawed culture at the Coast Guard has had dire consequences for victims. Many left the Academy or the service as a result of their experiences and the Coast Guard's subsequent failure to support them. In the words of one whistleblower:

Being raped is bad enough. But the institutional betrayal has been more damaging for me. It was the culture.

The problem of mishandled sexual assault and harassment is one of the present. The whistleblowers' accounts demonstrate that this problem is not one of the past—active servicemembers expressed concerns about current policy and culture failings around sexual misconduct. Long-serving Coast Guard members expressed disappointment in the Coast Guard's failure to improve its response to sexual misconduct throughout their decades of service:

I am heartbroken the Coast Guard had 24 years during my career to fix their 'culture'. This 'culture' did not change from the moment I attended bootcamp until I retired. . . . We are now on the 3rd or even 4th generation

*of females serving in the Coast Guard, and this 'culture' is still not a priority.
When will the Coast Guard make changing their 'culture' a priority?*

Additionally, whistleblowers reported to the Subcommittee that the Coast Guard's failings are not limited to its policies and culture. The Coast Guard has reportedly continued to mistreat survivors in its official dealings with them.

The victim outreach associated with Operation Fouled Anchor ("OFA") was inadequate and re-traumatizing. A whistleblower who was interviewed as part of OFA reported that she was never officially notified about the results of the investigation. Instead, the whistleblower allegedly saw documents related to her case aired on CNN during its coverage of OFA.

The Coast Guard has failed to provide survivors the necessary documentation to access U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs services. A whistleblower who recently separated from the Coast Guard following gender-based discrimination was left without options:

[T]he Coast Guard failed to process me out . . . and I was left without my separation paperwork needed to move on and access veteran services. . . . I explained that without the [documents] I was limited from accessing VA health care and mental health care, was unable to apply to veterans preference government civilian jobs, and unable to use time sensitive programs designed for recently separated veterans.

The Coast Guard has failed to provide survivors with their records, impacting their ability to understand what happened to them and to move forward with their lives. A former cadet recounted that, after her assault, her mother called the Academy regularly in an attempt to obtain her records. The whistleblower went on convalescence leave after the assault—during this time, she was unable to access her Coast Guard records, which prevented her from receiving the care she needed.

Whistleblowers reported complicated feelings about the Coast Guard following their experiences. While many expressed love for the Coast Guard and belief in its mission, their pride was mixed with disappointment and betrayal. In the words of a whistleblower who served for nearly three decades:

I love the Coast Guard. . . . There are so many incredible people in the Coast Guard, serving for the right reasons. Unfortunately, the malignant sub-culture continues. . . . We must do better if we want a full workforce who trusts the organization to take care of them when they need it the most.

Coast Guard members past and present and their reports to the Subcommittee have made clear the need for immediate change both at the Academy and in the Coast Guard. Although Operation Fouled Anchor initially brought these problems to light, these failures span both the Academy and the Fleet—the Coast Guard as a whole must change course and work to build a culture in which everyone is safe, respected, and valued.

Overview

On September 12, 2023, the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (“the Subcommittee”) initiated a bipartisan inquiry into the U.S. Coast Guard (“the Coast Guard”) regarding reports that the U.S. Coast Guard Academy (“the Academy”) mishandled dozens of sexual misconduct cases and that it subsequently withheld findings of its investigation into those cases from Congress.³ Through the course of this inquiry, more than 80 individuals have shared their personal experiences in the Coast Guard and at the Coast Guard Academy. At least 39 of those individuals have come forward to share accounts of sexual assault and at least 27 have come forward to share accounts of sexual harassment with the Subcommittee.⁴ These stories, spanning from the 1970s through the 2020s, depict systemic failures at the Coast Guard Academy and in the Coast Guard—including barriers to reporting, retaliation, reprisal, and a culture that failed to take seriously sexual harassment and violence among its ranks—that continue to this day.

a. Anonymization and Compilation of Collected Information

The following report is a compilation of accounts that have been collected by the Subcommittee. To protect the privacy of the individuals who have shared the intimate details of their lives and experiences, names and other personal details have been anonymized except where that individual has previously shared their story publicly.⁵ The detailed reports provided by survivors are a part of the Subcommittee’s internal record of this inquiry. These reports have been invaluable in understanding the depth and breadth of the Coast Guard’s failure to foster and maintain a culture intolerant of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

The Subcommittee has not investigated the details of each claim, and therefore cannot verify the truth of each allegation. The commonalities among the stories, however, are

³ Letter from Chair Richard Blumenthal and Ranking Member Ron Johnson, Permanent Subcomm. on Investigations, to Admiral Linda Fagan, Commandant of U.S. Coast Guard, Sept. 12, 2023, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023-09-12-Blumenthal-and-Johnson-Letter-to-USCG-re-Operation-Fouled-Anchor.pdf>.

⁴ Other whistleblowers shared stories of non-sexual misconduct, including alleged gender and racial discrimination and retaliation.

⁵ To further protect whistleblower privacy, the individual stories detailed in this report are not attributed or cited, even in anonymized form, to minimize the risk of personal identification. These stories are on file with the Subcommittee.

striking. Whistleblowers from different regions described similar patterns of cover-up and evasion, and whistleblowers from decades ago shared experiences that mirror the dynamics that persist today.

b. Information Collected by the Subcommittee

Between September 2023 and May 2024, the Subcommittee heard from more than 80 individuals about their experiences in the Coast Guard, at the Academy, or both. At least 39 disclosed that they were sexually assaulted and at least 27 disclosed they were sexually harassed while attending the Academy or enlisted in the Coast Guard, while approximately 10 others described events or a culture that they had witnessed or been informed of while there. The misconduct that was reported to the Subcommittee occurred both at the Academy and among the active duty ranks. Approximately 44% of the reported instances of sexual assault and approximately 2% of the reported instances of sexual harassment took place at the Academy, while the majority of whistleblowers reported instances that occurred in the active duty fleet.

Background

a. Operation Fouled Anchor

Operation Fouled Anchor (“OFA”) was an internal Coast Guard investigation into the Academy’s mishandling of sexual assault cases from 1990 to 2006.⁶ The Coast Guard initiated Operation Fouled Anchor in 2014 after a Coast Guard officer disclosed to her supervisor that she had been raped by an upperclassman in 1997 while attending the Academy and that the Academy mishandled her case.⁷ Coast Guard Investigative Services (CGIS) opened an investigation into the matter and found that “there appeared to be a disturbing pattern of conducting internal administrative investigations and/or initiating disenrollment for sexual misconduct instead of referring the matter for criminal investigation.”⁸

⁶ U.S. Coast Guard, *Memorandum: ‘Fouled Anchor’ Investigation – Final Report*, 2, (Jan. 31, 2020), https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/documents/FOULED_ANCHOR_INVESTIGATION_FINAL_REPORT_AND_ENCLOSURE-508Compliant.pdf.

⁷ *Id.* at 1.

⁸ *Id.*

As a part of Operation Fouled Anchor, CGIS investigated 102 events of rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment committed by Academy cadets or that otherwise occurred at the Academy between 1990 and 2006.⁹ CGIS ultimately identified 63 potential victims and 43 alleged perpetrators.¹⁰

The six-year investigation culminated in a January 31, 2020 memorandum titled, “Fouled Anchor Investigation – Final Report,” which found that the Academy had previously been aware of allegations against 30 of the 43 individuals, but that only five of these cases were reported to CGIS and/or local law enforcement.¹¹ The 2020 memorandum concluded that, during the years reviewed, Academy leadership:

[F]ailed to take sufficient action to ensure a safe environment - particularly for female cadets - and failed to instill a culture intolerant of sexual misconduct. They did not promote and maintain a climate conducive to reporting sexual assault and they did not adequately investigate allegations as serious criminal matters and hold perpetrators appropriately accountable. Most importantly, the Academy too often failed to provide the support, trust, and care that is so vital for victims of sexual assault.¹²

Despite this conclusion, no action was taken regarding any Academy official who may have had a decision-making role in the cases.¹³ Of the 43 alleged perpetrators uncovered in the investigation, the Coast Guard referred three of their cases to other military services where the individuals were serving and removed two from the Coast Guard promotion list, after which they separated from the Coast Guard.¹⁴ For the remaining 38 individuals, no action was taken because the Coast Guard determined either that it no longer had jurisdiction over the individual or that the allegations were not supported by a preponderance of the evidence.¹⁵

Although the final report was dated in 2020, Operation Fouled Anchor was hidden from the public and from Congress until the summer of 2023, when media reports revealed

⁹ *Id.* at 2.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.* at 4.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

its existence.¹⁶ Following the public disclosure of Operation Fouled Anchor, the Commandant of the Coast Guard, Admiral Linda Fagan, and Master Chief Heath B. Jones released a statement apologizing to the entire Coast Guard workforce, assault survivors, and Congress.¹⁷ The leaders acknowledged the Coast Guard's failures and expressed a commitment to fix them going forward.¹⁸ In July 2023, Admiral Fagan announced a 90-Day Accountability and Transparency Review ("ATR"), to look at "current law, policy, processes, practices, resources, and service culture relevant to eradicating sexual assault and harassment."¹⁹ This review concluded on October 20, 2023.²⁰ The Coast Guard released its memorandum documenting the Accountability and Transparency Review on December 6, 2023.²¹

b. The Subcommittee's Investigation

On September 12, 2023, the Subcommittee initiated an inquiry into the mishandling of sexual assault and sexual harassment cases at the Academy, as well as the Coast Guard's failure to notify Congress about the conclusion of Operation Fouled Anchor.²² The

¹⁶ Blake Ellis, Melanie Hicken & Audrey Ash, *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>.

¹⁷ U.S. Coast Guard, *Workforce Message: Accountability and Transparency*, by Admiral Linda Fagan and Master Chief Heath Jones, U.S. Coast Guard (July 17, 2023), <https://www.mycg.uscg.mil/News/Article/3461192/workforce-message-accountability-and-transparency/>.

¹⁸ *Id.* The U.S. Coast Guard Academy Alumni Association also held a Community Healing Event on November 15, 2023, which invited survivors, allies, and individuals seeking information from the Coast Guard to hear officials speak about how they are responding to Operation Fouled Anchor, to learn from outside groups about trauma and resources, and to connect with one another. See USCGA Alumni Community Healing Event, U.S. Coast Guard Academy Alumni Association, https://www.cgaalumni.org/s/1043/21/interior.aspx?sid=1043&gid=1&pgid=7096&content_id=16412.

¹⁹ U.S. Coast Guard, *Workforce Message: Accountability and Transparency*, by Admiral Linda Fagan and Master Chief Heath Jones, U.S. Coast Guard (July 17, 2023), <https://www.mycg.uscg.mil/News/Article/3461192/workforce-message-accountability-and-transparency/>.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Press Release, U.S. Coast Guard, Coast Guard publishes Accountability and Transparency Review Report and Commandant's Directed Actions (Dec. 6, 2023), <https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/3608614/coast-guard-publishes-accountability-and-transparency-review-report-and-command/>.

²² Letter from Chair Richard Blumenthal and Ranking Member Ron Johnson, Permanent Subcomm. on Investigations, to Admiral Linda Fagan, Commandant of the United States Coast Guard, Sept. 12, 2023, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023-09-12-Blumenthal-and-Johnson-Letter-to-USCG-re-Operation-Fouled-Anchor.pdf>.

Subcommittee requested all records relating to Operation Fouled Anchor, sexual assault and harassment policies and investigations, and the Accountability and Transparency Review.²³ On December 12, 2023, the Subcommittee held a hearing with survivors of sexual assault and harassment, who testified about the failures of Coast Guard and Academy leadership.²⁴ On June 11, 2024, Admiral Fagan testified before the Subcommittee.²⁵ As of the release of this report, the Subcommittee's inquiry is ongoing.

c. Sexual misconduct has been dramatically underreported in the Coast Guard and at the Academy

While Operation Fouled Anchor uncovered a pattern of mishandling reports of sexual misconduct, it is important to also note that many whistleblowers that came forward to the Subcommittee never reported their abuse to the Academy or Coast Guard, and were never a part of Operation Fouled Anchor. Of the Academy whistleblowers from whom the Subcommittee has heard, at least 72% were not part of Operation Fouled Anchor. The Subcommittee has also heard from a large number of whistleblowers who did not attend the Academy and instead reported misconduct from their time on active duty.

Approximately half of the instances of sexual misconduct disclosed to the Subcommittee were never reported to the Coast Guard or the Academy. Of the instances disclosed to the Subcommittee, less than 47% of sexual assault instances and 58% of sexual harassment instances were reported to the Academy or the Coast Guard.²⁶ At least 14 of these unreported assaults took place while the whistleblower was attending the Coast Guard Academy and at least ten took place while the whistleblower was serving on active duty in the Coast Guard.

It is not uncommon for survivors of sexual assault and harassment to avoid reporting their abuse. According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, an estimated 63%

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ U.S. Congress, Senate, Permanent Subcomm. on Investigations, *Coast Guard Academy Whistleblowers: Stories of Sexual Assault and Harassment*, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., Dec. 12, 2023, S. Hrg. 335-224, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/subcommittees/investigations/hearings/coast-guard-academy-whistleblowers-stories-of-sexual-assault-and-harassment/>.

²⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, Permanent Subcomm. on Investigations, *Coast Guard Oversight: Sexual Assault and Harassment*, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., June 11, 2024, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/subcommittees/investigations/hearings/coast-guard-oversight-sexual-assault-and-harassment/>.

²⁶ This statistic includes only those instances in which the Subcommittee has information regarding whether the misconduct was reported. Instances about which the Subcommittee does not have information about reporting are not included.

of sexual assault survivors do not report the incident to authorities.²⁷ A 2019 National Academy of Public Administration study conducted at the Coast Guard Academy found “interviewees mentioned existing stigma in reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment incidents due to concerns of not being taken seriously, lack of confidentiality, and being part of the ‘rumor mill.’”²⁸ Interviewees also reported that the lengthy reporting and investigation procedure was a deterrent.²⁹ Consistent with that study, the Subcommittee observed a distinct pattern of alleged practice and culture in the Academy and at the Coast Guard that led to the silencing of victims. These practices are discussed in detail in the following sections.

d. Sexual misconduct has a chronic and life-long impact on victims

Across the decades of survivors that came forward to the Subcommittee to share their experiences, it is apparent that the sexual misconduct that they experienced at the Academy and in the Coast Guard had a profound and lasting impact on their professional and personal lives. Sexual assault and harassment were described by one whistleblower as a “life sentence” that impacted them in every way—“mental and physical health, personal and professional relationships, career and home life.” Several of the whistleblowers who came forward to the Subcommittee felt pressured to leave the Academy before they graduated or end their careers early due to what they experienced. Former cadet Caitlin Maro requested to be separated from the Academy before what she described as a “shameful and humiliating” investigation concluded, telling the Subcommittee that she was “[u]nable to endure the atmosphere and fear[ed] for her safety.”

Many whistleblowers described the lasting impact that their experiences have had on their mental and physical health. Melissa McCafferty testified: “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.”³⁰ Several of the whistleblowers

²⁷ Statistics About Sexual Violence, National Sexual Violence Resource Center, https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_factsheet_media_packet_statistics-about-sexual-violence_0.pdf.

²⁸ National Academy of Public Administration, *An Assessment of Cultural Competence at the United States Coast Guard Academy* (Feb. 2022), <https://s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/napa-2021/studies/u-s-coast-guard-academy-cultural-competence-assessment/NAPA-Final-Report-An-Assessment-of-Cultural-Competence-at-the-United-States-Coast-Guard-Academy-February-2022.pdf>.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate, Permanent Subcomm. on Investigations, *Coast Guard Academy Whistleblowers: Stories of Sexual Assault and Harassment*, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., Dec. 12, 2023, S. Hrg.

reported lasting struggles with depression, anxiety, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other health issues stemming from the trauma of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

A whistleblower who reported a superior for sexual harassment and groping described that the Coast Guard's reported failures had a persistent impact on her life and career:

Having experienced, first-hand, culturally ingrained skepticism about and hostility towards survivors' claims, plus the failure of Coast Guard leadership to investigate my own perpetrator's actions, led me to adopt a stance of silence following all subsequent occasions of being harassed or assaulted, of which there were many over the next twenty years, as well as refrain from disclosing an earlier rape I experienced at the hands of an Academy classmate. I continue to experience post-traumatic stress disorder to this day.

Other whistleblowers described how their decision to leave the service or end their careers with the Coast Guard earlier than intended stemmed from the sexual misconduct they experienced. One whistleblower who left active duty service stated, "This one service member's actions and the lack of leadership's willingness to hold him accountable greatly impacted the rest of [my] career and life decisions." Another whistleblower came from a military family and expected to have a lifelong career in service. She left the Coast Guard in the late 2000s because of the assaults she endured at the Academy and the culture she observed while on active duty. She stated, "I found that a culture of 'boys will be boys' existed at an even higher level in the service." An additional whistleblower left active duty after experiencing sexual assault, sexual harassment, and an unsatisfactory investigation. A whistleblower who was assaulted at the Academy told the Subcommittee: "Being raped is bad enough. But the institutional betrayal has been more damaging for me. It was the culture."

335-224, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/subcommittees/investigations/hearings/coast-guard-academy-whistleblowers-stories-of-sexual-assault-and-harassment/>.

Reported culture fostered sexual misconduct at the Coast Guard Academy

Whistleblowers spanning five decades described an Academy culture around sexual misconduct that was highly skeptical of reporting, thus silencing victims and enabling abuse. They recounted that the hostility of their peers and the ambivalence of Academy leadership created an environment in which reporting was heavily discouraged. Moreover, a reported lack of access to proper medical care further victimized those cadets who sought help following an incident.

a. The Academy's culture of ostracization, shaming, and disbelief silenced victims of assault and harassment or made them regret coming forward to report

Whistleblowers described an Academy culture in which survivors of misconduct were ostracized, not believed, and blamed for their assaults and where cadets encouraged each other to ignore or commit misconduct. This hostile culture was deeply harmful to the whistleblowers who reported their abuse and also deterred many from reporting.

A late 2000s Academy graduate told the Subcommittee that fellow cadets she believed to be friends and mentors told her that they didn't believe her report of sexual assault and spread rumors that her report was false. After her report, "[she] was harassed on a daily basis. . . . [She] avoided all [A]cademy functions; [she] rarely ate dinner because of the nausea that [she] experienced during meals as a result of gestures, sneers and demeaning comments from other cadets."

In her testimony, Caitlin Maro shared that she didn't initially report an incident where she was groped on campus in front of at least 20 witnesses. Maro reported struggling against her assailant, which caught the attention of other cadets who "started laughing and egging him on."³¹ She said that, after reporting the harassment to the Academy:

My fellow cadets abandoned me; they let doors slam in my face, created humiliating nicknames for me, and spread particularly ugly rumors. I knew then that my career in the U.S. Coast Guard was over before it even began.

³¹ *Id.*

Cadet Kyra Holmstrup, an Academy cadet, similarly testified to her experience after making an unrestricted³² report in 2020. She stated:

*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.*³³

Another whistleblower attributed her decision to not report multiple assaults at the Academy, in part, to fear of ostracization and retaliation: "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."

b. The Academy's leadership discouraged victims from reporting sexual misconduct

At least three whistleblowers described trying to report an instance of sexual assault or harassment to an Academy professor or staff member and being discouraged from doing so. For example, an early 2000s Academy graduate reported to the Subcommittee, "I told a counselor about that night and was told if I reported him [her assailant], I will probably ruin his career. I would be subject to a psych exam and will probably be forced out."

Another whistleblower told the Subcommittee that she filed a written statement with the law office at the Academy to report being raped, but was never contacted for an investigation into the incident. She contacted the office months later to ask for an update after hearing that her assailant was in officer candidate training for another service branch. She was soon called into the Academy law offices where two Coast Guard lawyers allegedly discouraged her from pursuing the issue further. She said:

³² Survivors can choose between making a restricted or unrestricted report of sexual assault. Restricted reports are not shared with law enforcement or the survivor's chain of command, while unrestricted reports are disclosed to Coast Guard Investigative Services (Coast Guard law enforcement) and the survivor's chain of command. See Sexual Assault Prevention, Response, & Recovery (SAPRR) Program CG-1K4, U.S. Coast Guard, <https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/Assistant-Commandant-for-Human-Resources-CG-1/Health-Safety-and-Work-Life-CG-11/Sexual-Assault-Prevention-Response-and-Recovery-Program/>.

³³ U.S. Congress, Senate, Permanent Subcomm. on Investigations, *Coast Guard Academy Whistleblowers: Stories of Sexual Assault and Harassment*, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., Dec. 12, 2023, S. Hrg. 335-224, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/subcommittees/investigations/hearings/coast-guard-academy-whistleblowers-stories-of-sexual-assault-and-harassment/>.

They told me I could pursue an investigation; however, that would impact my studies, my ability to graduate that Spring, and my first duty station . . . [A]s a 1/C [fourth year] cadet, I felt that two officers telling me to focus on my studies and my career is what I needed to do.

c. Victims of sexual misconduct at the Academy received inadequate medical care

At least five whistleblowers told the Subcommittee that they received inappropriate or substandard medical care at the Academy's medical clinic, which either discouraged them from reporting, retraumatized them following abuse, or both.

A whistleblower shared with the Subcommittee that she was sexually assaulted twice during her first year at the Academy. She felt unable to report the assaults to the Academy in part because of her experiences at the medical clinic. The whistleblower stated, "The one place that I should have been comfortable to make the report, the medical clinic, was a place where I first felt as if assaults were normal in the service."

During one of my first visits to the medical clinic as a cadet at the Coast Guard Academy I was encouraged to start birth control. Even though I was not sexually active, the medical officer stated that it is safe to be on birth control because, 'You never know what might happen.'

After the first assault, the whistleblower reflected,

I remembered what the medical officer said and all I could think was that the service did its job by encouraging me to get on birth control because I never knew what would happen because "IT" happened to me.

Another whistleblower, who was sexually assaulted at the Academy, reported being discouraged from continuing mental health counseling. The whistleblower shared with the Subcommittee:

[T]he cadet counselor told me during my 3rd visit to her to not come back or she would have to report it and it would show up on my medical record which could also impact my ability to receive a commission.

One whistleblower shared with the Subcommittee her story of fighting for a medical discharge. In her first year at the Academy, this whistleblower was sexually assaulted.

Suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, the whistleblower attempted to go on convalescence leave. The whistleblower's request was initially denied but eventually was granted after her family hired outside legal counsel. After leaving, the whistleblower stated that she was threatened with absent without official leave (AWOL) charges and had her medical coverage rescinded. The whistleblower recounted that it was only through the help of her parents, outside legal counsel, and eventually her member of Congress that she was finally able to receive a medical discharge.

Policies reportedly fostered sexual misconduct at the Academy

The primary policies alleged to have fostered a culture tolerant of sexual misconduct at the Academy were (1) regulations around punishment for collateral misconduct, (2) regulations regarding cadet interactions, and (3) the investigation and reporting process following an incident.

a. Cadets' fear of punishment for collateral misconduct silenced victims of assault and harassment

Until recently, cadets reporting sexual misconduct were not protected from punishment for unrelated misconduct that came to light as a result of said report.³⁴ Common examples of collateral misconduct include underage drinking, unsanctioned dating (i.e., relationships between under- and upperclassmen), and missing curfew.³⁵ Fear of punishment for collateral misconduct was a commonly cited reason for whistleblowers not reporting their experiences to the Coast Guard.

A whistleblower who served in the Coast Guard for over 25 years told the Subcommittee, that despite having experienced multiple instances of sexual assault and harassment at the Academy in the mid-1990s, she did not report those incidents because of the likelihood of collateral punishment.

³⁴ AJ Pulkkinen, *Take a closer look at the Coast Guard's Safe to Report policy*, U.S. Coast Guard (May 8, 2024), <https://www.mycg.uscg.mil/News/Article/3691069/take-a-closer-look-at-the-coast-guards-safe-to-report-policy/#~:text=Under%20the%20Safe%20to%20Report,or%20disrupt%20a%20sexual%20assault.>

³⁵ *Id.*

I never came forward to report my assaults. I knew I would not be taken seriously and I saw how women who did come forward were treated. They would be blamed for causing their assault, punished for consuming alcohol or other infractions that paled in comparison to the crimes committed against them, or victims wouldn't be believed that they were assaulted in the first place.

The fear of punishment for collateral misconduct was sufficiently powerful that several whistleblowers told the Subcommittee that they feared punishment for having inappropriate contact with senior cadets—given the Academy's strict rules regarding dating among different class years—even if that contact was not initiated or wanted on their part.³⁶ One whistleblower shared that, as a cadet in the 2010s, the threat of collateral misconduct was used as blackmail to keep her from reporting repeated sexual assaults by the same perpetrator for a year.

He blackmailed me, using his position over me and the fact that I drank underage to get me to have sex with him. He knew that I would get into more trouble for underage drinking than he would for blackmailing me for sex. He was right.

An Academy graduate who served in the Coast Guard for over 12 years testified before the Subcommittee that she did not report her experience of sexual assault, in part, because she feared discipline for going on an off-campus trip with another, older, cadet.

b. Academy investigation practices are reportedly insufficient, retraumatizing, and fail to provide meaningful accountability or justice

Whistleblowers who reported their experiences were dissatisfied with the resulting investigations, even expressing that the negative effects of the investigation process were similar to or greater than the effects of the assaults themselves. At least five whistleblowers alleged the Academy's investigations were insufficient and failed to (1) promptly and diligently investigate misconduct, (2) properly document victims' allegations, (3) prioritize victim safety, and/or (4) provide meaningful justice and accountability.

³⁶ U.S. Coast Guard Academy, *Sponsor Family Program Overview*, U.S. Coast Guard, (Jan. 2024), <https://uscga.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/SFP-Overview.pdf> (dating is permitted between members of adjacent classes except Fourth Class cadets [first year students] who may only date classmates).

i. The Academy failed to promptly and diligently investigate misconduct and keep victims informed

In some cases, even after an instance of assault or harassment was reported, the Academy was slow to initiate an investigation or take claims seriously. Caitlin Maro testified that the Academy did not promptly initiate an investigation in her case:

It was only after my mother got involved that an investigation ensued. . . . 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.³⁷

After investigations were initiated, some whistleblowers told the Subcommittee that the investigatory process was extremely slow and they were given little information on the progress of their cases:

The investigation took the rest of the semester to complete (even without waiting for my rape kit forensics to be completed). I contacted CGIS on a weekly basis receiving non-descript responses from them and no indication of their progress. . . . I felt I was the only person with the urgency to take a criminal out of the barracks.

Cadet Kyra Holmstrup testified:

I do believe that there were many things that were dropped during my case... I did not have the ability to understand what was going on with my case. I, like Caitlin [Maro], have to FOIA for my case packet. I have not seen the entirety of it as well and neither did my SVC [Special Victims' Counsel], my lawyer, at the time. So he was not able to fully prepare me for what I was going into [her perpetrator's adjudication].

In contrast to the survivor experiences discussed above, Cadet Holmstrup reported that her assailant had access to detailed information about the case during the pendency of

³⁷ U.S. Congress, Senate, Permanent Subcomm. on Investigations, Coast Guard Academy Whistleblowers: Stories of Sexual Assault and Harassment, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., Dec. 12, 2023, S. Hrg. 335-224, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/subcommittees/investigations/hearings/coast-guard-academy-whistleblowers-stories-of-sexual-assault-and-harassment/>..

the investigation, which he then used to further shame and ostracize her. In Cadet Holmstrup's written testimony she stated:

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 [Special Victims' Counsel] 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.³⁸

A whistleblower from the early 2000s echoed Cadet Holmstrup's report of different restrictions on information applicable to victims and perpetrators. The whistleblower stated that she was given a verbal "gag order" to not discuss any matters related to her case. However, her perpetrator was not similarly restricted as he was to be considered "innocent until proven guilty."

ii. The Academy failed to fully document victims' testimony and allegations

An Academy culture skeptical of victims and hostile to reporting was mirrored in whistleblowers' stories regarding the official documentation process. Whistleblowers who were able to gain access to documents regarding their cases reported incomplete or inaccurate documentation generated by Academy staff.

A whistleblower who reported being groped and bitten by her assailant discovered that the charge sheet did not accurately reflect her report:

I FOIA requested my record, and the charge sheet reads "allegedly sexually harassed." When I repeatedly stated that I was bitten and groped which is a "physical/sexual assault" and I had teeth marks in a place I couldn't bite myself and witnesses that saw the marks. . .

A whistleblower who obtained documents related to her sexual assault case after leaving the Academy stated, "I think it's funny to note that my perspective was not always

³⁸ *Id.*

accounted for in the documentation of allegations. . . . There are many aspects of my testimony that were not at all represented [in the documentation].” The former Cadet was only able to obtain these documents because another Coast Guard member received them as a part of an unrelated court martial defense.

iii. The Academy failed to prioritize victim safety during investigations

No-contact orders are essential tools in ensuring victim safety during the pendency of an investigation.³⁹ At least three whistleblowers alleged, however, that the Academy failed to issue or enforce them in a meaningful way, thus jeopardizing victims’ physical safety and mental wellbeing.

A whistleblower who was not granted a request for relocation away from her assailant reported to the Subcommittee the devastating impact this had on her daily life and ability to heal:

[M]y rapist lived about 100 feet from me every day in the room in which he raped me. My assailant was in such close quarters I saw him on a daily basis in duties, in the halls, on the bulkhead . . . and even at meals. Every time I saw him, I immediately had a panic attack.

This whistleblower reported that the Academy’s failure to separate her from her assailant not only jeopardized her safety, but also impacted her roommates:

My roommates also felt threatened by my assailant and had discussed this with [leadership] as well. On the night I went to the hospital, my assailant came to my room and harassed my roommates . . . to the extent they required another cadet to sleep in the room with them for protection. Though the chain of command fully knew of the persistent threat, my assailant was not moved nor was he separated from me.

Cadet Holmstrup testified that while the Academy made some efforts to keep the complainant and the accused separated, these efforts were insufficient to ensure her safety. Despite the Academy having moved Holmstrup’s attacker to a different Company and having issued a 20-foot no-contact order, the order was not properly enforced. Holmstrup testified:

³⁹ See Christopher T. Benitez, Dale E. McNiel & Renée L. Binder, *Do Protection Orders Protect?*, 38(3) J. AM. ACAD. PSYCHIATRY & L. ONLINE 376 (2010).

I thought the No Contact Order would protect me. It didn't. . . . Despite my attacker's blatant violations of orders, my SVC [Special Victims' Counsel] told me no meaningful action would be taken, and that this 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.⁴⁰

A whistleblower whose case was reexamined during Operation Fouled Anchor disclosed to the Subcommittee that she felt unsafe participating in the new investigation and wished for her assailant not to know she was involved. Her request for a protective order, however, was not granted.

iv. Academy investigations failed to provide justice and accountability

Whistleblowers reported that the Academy's investigation procedures allowed their assailants to escape accountability, including criminal prosecution. Instead, Academy processes allegedly allowed assailants to continue their military careers—reportedly including by joining the enlisted ranks without carrying a record of sexual misconduct with them—or receive honorable discharges. Simply put, none of the whistleblowers who disclosed sexual misconduct to the Subcommittee reported the misconduct was adjudicated through court-martial, which is a criminal trial for members accused of violating the Uniform Code of Military Justice, or any other criminal process.⁴¹

Instead of a criminal process, several whistleblowers described the use of non-judicial punishment ("NJP" or "Flag Mast") by both the Academy and the Coast Guard to adjudicate their cases. NJP is a non-criminal, internal proceeding where the Coast Guard or the Academy can hear and rule on alleged violations of the Coast Guard's code of conduct.⁴² Per the Manual for Courts-Martial, "[n]onjudicial punishment provides commanders with an essential and prompt means of maintaining good order and discipline and also promotes positive behavior changes in servicemembers without the

⁴⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate, Permanent Subcomm. on Investigations, *Coast Guard Academy Whistleblowers: Stories of Sexual Assault and Harassment*, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., Dec. 12, 2023, S. Hrg. 335-224, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/subcommittees/investigations/hearings/coast-guard-academy-whistleblowers-stories-of-sexual-assault-and-harassment/>.

⁴¹ See Military Justice Overview, U.S. Department of Defense Victim and Witness Assistance, <https://vwac.defense.gov/military.aspx>.

⁴² See 10 U.S.C. 815; Jim Absher, *What is Non-Judicial Punishment*, Military.com, March 25, 2022, <https://www.military.com/benefits/military-legal-matters/nonjudicial-punishment-explained.html>.

stigma of a court-martial conviction.”⁴³ It is a less formal forum than court-martial and is intended to adjudicate minor offenses.⁴⁴ Importantly, it also allows the decision of whether to proceed with punishment and what punishment is appropriate to remain within the chain of command.⁴⁵

At least eight whistleblowers shared with the Subcommittee that they had reported at least one event of sexual misconduct to the Coast Guard Academy. At least four of these events were reportedly adjudicated through NJP. In those cases, the Academy allowed alleged perpetrators to escape criminal accountability for their actions and instead used a process for adjudicating minor offenses. The remaining perpetrators reportedly never faced even the minor accountability provided by the NJP process.

A whistleblower from the early 2000s who reported her assailant for alleged rape—punishable as a crime under Article 120 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice⁴⁶—told the Subcommittee that her assailant never faced criminal charges for the incident. Instead, he was reportedly dismissed from the Academy following an NJP process.

Whistleblowers whose cases were adjudicated by NJP recounted experiences of their assailants receiving limited punishment, being discharged honorably, or being transferred. A whistleblower who attended the Academy in the 1990s reported that, rather than facing meaningful justice, her assailant was never properly investigated and failed to face accountability. Instead, he reportedly “was given demerits and told to write a paper” and “went on to graduate and continued to sexually attack females.”

Cadet Kyra Holmstrup reported learning that her assailant would receive an honorable discharge and thus be able to re-enlist in the Coast Guard.⁴⁷

⁴³ U.S. Dep’t of Defense, Joint Serv. Comm. on Mil. Just., *Manual for Courts-Martial United States (2024 Edition)*, [https://jsc.defense.gov/Portals/99/2024%20MCM%20files/MCM%20\(2024%20ed\)%20-%20TOC%20no%20index.pdf?ver=b7JVpxV5rblHg0ENICRVKQ%3D%3D](https://jsc.defense.gov/Portals/99/2024%20MCM%20files/MCM%20(2024%20ed)%20-%20TOC%20no%20index.pdf?ver=b7JVpxV5rblHg0ENICRVKQ%3D%3D).

⁴⁴ See 10 U.S.C. 815; *Id.*

⁴⁵ See 10 U.S.C. § 815(b). NJP is presided over by commanders who can, in certain circumstances, delegate NJP authority to a principal assistant. *Id.* § 815(a). The UCMJ gives commanders the power to impose certain types of discipline via NJP.

⁴⁶ 10 U.S.C. § 920(a).

⁴⁷ U.S. Congress, Senate, Permanent Subcomm. on Investigations, *Coast Guard Academy Whistleblowers: Stories of Sexual Assault and Harassment*, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., Dec. 12, 2023, S. Hrg. 335-224, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/subcommittees/investigations/hearings/coast-guard-academy-whistleblowers-stories-of-sexual-assault-and-harassment/>.

The SVCs [Special Victims' Counsel] 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.

Reported Coast Guard culture and policies similarly fostered sexual misconduct in the active duty fleet

The reports of flawed culture and policies creating the conditions for alleged widespread abuses were not unique to the Academy. Whistleblowers reported a pervasive “boys will be boys” culture that was tolerant of sexual assault and sexual harassment, not just at the Academy, but throughout the Coast Guard. One whistleblower shared:

I couldn't trust the Coast Guard to be there for me. The victim assistance was laughable. I needed to heal, and the organization that I loved, but wounded me would not allow that.

In fact, the specific issues discussed above regarding Academy culture—inadequate investigations, peer hostility, leadership discouragement, and substandard medical care—were also all reported by whistleblowers in active duty.

a. Coast Guard investigations failed to provide justice or accountability in cases of sexual misconduct

Much like Academy whistleblowers, active duty whistleblowers reported feeling failed by the Coast Guard's investigation and accountability processes.

A whistleblower who was sexually assaulted while on active duty reported an investigation process that was retraumatizing, belittling, and ultimately did not provide meaningful justice. CGIS agents allegedly “questioned the veracity of [the whistleblower's] story” and told the whistleblower that his assailant's story was

"believable." The whistleblower reported feeling as though the case was not properly investigated:

The investigation ended there. I was not informed regarding who else was interviewed. My assailant was not questioned further. Members of my command . . . were not questioned about the culture or to corroborate any information from my statements. In short, not much was done to support my claim of sexual assault.

The Coast Guard later reopened this whistleblower's case. But the whistleblower reported witnessing investigatory failures similar to those he encountered in the initial inquiry:

I was informed that . . . no administrative action would be taken against the perpetrator. He was due to retire in a few weeks and there was not enough information to go on to reduce his retirement or discharge status. He was not approached during the second investigation. I did not give another statement. It appeared to me that a thorough investigation was not conducted.

Another whistleblower recounted feeling shamed by CGIS after reporting sexual harassment: "CGIS re victimized me, there was no compassion or empathy on their part. They treated me like I was the perpetrator and the one at fault. It was an awful experience."

As described above, NJP—used by both the Academy and the Coast Guard to adjudicate cases of sexual misconduct—has allegedly led to assailants escaping the full force of criminal prosecution and meaningful accountability. None of the whistleblowers who reached out to the Subcommittee reported that their cases were adjudicated through courts-martial, and the majority of whistleblowers reported their cases being adjudicated through NJP. Like cadet whistleblowers, whistleblowers who were serving in the Coast Guard found NJP hearings inadequate.

A whistleblower who had been repeatedly sexually assaulted and harassed reported that her perpetrator was allowed to choose whether to face court martial or NJP. After he chose NJP, she was excluded from the room. On the morning of the NJP proceedings, the whistleblower was informed that the Coast Guard was dropping the sexual misconduct charges because the statute of limitations had expired during the investigation. The whistleblower had never been informed that this was a risk—the first

she heard of any potential statute of limitations problem was when it enabled her perpetrator to escape accountability for sexual misconduct. He instead received a nominal punishment for the remaining, non-sexual misconduct charges.

Another whistleblower who was sexually harassed while on active duty shared her frustration with her assailant's NJP hearing. Despite the victim having requested that the NJP process be "open"—which would have allowed the crew to hear the allegations and evidence—the Coast Guard reportedly granted the perpetrator's request to close the proceedings. Although the investigation had revealed a pattern of misconduct with many victims, the whistleblower reported that the NJP failed to leverage meaningful accountability.

During the investigation, they found that this was a pattern of behavior for him, even at previous units. He had never been held accountable. Ever. . . . It was sickening and humiliating. . . . They did not restrict him to base, they did not make him forfeit pay, they did not make him do anything that every other person that had been found guilty at NJP for lesser crimes do for accountability. It was a slap in the face to all of his victims. This man was a sexual predator, and got off virtually Scot free [sic] because he was a "hero," and a good ole boy.

A whistleblower who received a Military Protective Order against her perpetrator after an assault reported that the Coast Guard failed to properly enforce that order. Despite her having photo evidence of him violating the order, the Coast Guard did not follow accountability procedures for the violation. Instead, her perpetrator was simply told to stop violating the order.

Another active duty whistleblower reported the disappointment and self-blame she felt when learning, years after reporting another member for sexual harassment, that member had allegedly gone on to harass other women:

I felt that I had done my part, justice would prevail, and we made the Coast Guard a[] safer place. Yesterday, I found out I was wrong. A woman shared her own story on social media . . . [and a] name that got mentioned was the same man I had reported years prior. Sure, he got reduced in pay grade, but he continued his career, and obviously continued his behavior.

Despite the perpetrator having numerous negative administrative actions against him from prior units for similar behavior, the Coast Guard reportedly failed to take meaningful

action against him. Instead, he was permitted to finish his tour and become a civilian law enforcement officer.

An additional whistleblower reported a similar failure in accountability. She and several other women were stalked by a perpetrator who also made false reports of them having inappropriate relationships with him. Despite the Coast Guard allegedly concluding that he was stalking his victims, he was neither prosecuted nor removed from the service. He was instead reportedly given the choice between being transferred to a remote duty station or quietly retiring.

Another whistleblower reported the experience of learning her abuser had been allowed to re-start boot camp. Despite her having reported the assault and the perpetrator having been originally removed from boot camp, the perpetrator later was reportedly allowed back in to the service.

b. Active duty survivors were harmed by serving beside their assailants

Much like Academy cadets reported being deeply impacted by having to live, eat, and attend school alongside their assailants, active duty whistleblowers report similar challenges in serving in close quarters with perpetrators.

Several whistleblowers reported fearing having to face their assailants again. One of these individuals, who was sexually assaulted and harassed on active duty, reported that her decision to leave the service ultimately came as a result of seeing her assailant on base over a decade after her assault.

This was defeating to me. This was another win for him. I felt I wasn't strong enough to face him even ten years later. I couldn't handle living on the same island or community as him. I didn't want my children growing up with him around. The idea sickened me. Had his actions been handled differently, I think my life may have had a very different trajectory.

A former cadet from the early 2010s described her fear of having to work with the men who assaulted and harassed her after graduation. She stated, "They were active-duty members of the Coast Guard and the Coast Guard is a very small branch. I lived in fear that I would be stationed with them again and that was a very real possibility."

c. Active duty members were disbelieved, ostracized, and shamed by their peers for reporting misconduct and abuse

Similar to Academy cadets, active duty whistleblowers reported ostracization and shaming from their peers following reports of abuse.

A whistleblower who faced sexual harassment at her duty station in the mid-2000s recounted facing hostility after informally telling her fellow line crew what had happened: "They laughed at me. I made the decision that I wouldn't report further if this is how my crew reacted to the situation." Nonetheless, she and another victim eventually chose to make an official report. When they did, "[e]veryone on the hangar deck chastised [them]" and "asked [them] why [they] were going after this 'hero's' [sic] career over some comments."

When a whistleblower reported a superior officer for sexual harassment and groping, her executive officer reportedly immediately blamed the whistleblower, a junior officer, as "responsible for ruining a good man's career."

Another whistleblower recounted facing harassment from her unit for over a year after reporting a fellow member's misconduct. The members who supported her also allegedly faced hostility and newly reporting members were told to "stay away from [her] because [she] was crazy and going to ruin their lives."

An additional whistleblower reported skepticism and minimization on the part of the CGIS agents who took her report. The agents questioned the whistleblower's character and reportedly forced her, despite her "sobbing uncontrollably," to show them where on her body her assailant had touched her. The agents then told her "if your hand just went up your thigh a little farther, then you would have been assaulted" and "this is only harassment and it's not that big of a deal."

Across decades of stories from whistleblowers, the phrases "slut", "bitch", "whore" and others were used to describe women in the Coast Guard, often in the context of them being associated with experiencing sexual assault or harassment. One whistleblower who was assaulted while on active duty shared, "In boot camp, my company commander told the females that you are either going to be a bitch or a whore." She did not report her assault "for the fear of retribution, punishment, shame, and embarrassment" fostered by statements like her company commander's:

Although I now know that my sexual assault was not my fault, there was no way I was ever going to be labeled or thought of [as] a "whore" especially after just taking a huge leap of faith into the unknown and being so excited to serve my country.

For another whistleblower, male colleagues reportedly began making derogatory comments about her gender almost immediately upon her arrival at the station. "Shortly after [she] arrived to the station the comments from majority of the guys started: whore, slut, other derogatory statements."

Another whistleblower reported that a fellow member repeatedly referred to her as the "slut CO [Commanding Officer]" and speculated that she was bound to be having sex with people on her crew because she "slept around so much." When she reported these comments, she was allegedly told that she would have to be removed from command and placed on shore assignment during the investigation:

[T]hey didn't want me to pursue an investigation so my punishment if I decided to proceed would be removal from command.

d. Active duty members faced career retaliation following reporting

Much like cadets, the Subcommittee received reports from Coast Guard members who felt that coming forward to report their experiences to leadership hurt their careers. The most direct example of this retaliation was through Officer Evaluation Reports ("OERs"), which are critical to receiving desirable assignments and promotion opportunities. One whistleblower, who served over 25 years in the Coast Guard, shared:

[M]y 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 one point; however, he faced no accountability. . .

Another whistleblower shared that it took over five years to resolve an "inaccurate and degrading evaluation" made by her supervisor, who was sexually harassing her while on assignment at the Academy. That same supervisor, against whom the whistleblower had lodged an official sexual harassment complaint, later served on the whistleblower's

promotion board. The whistleblower was reportedly passed over for the promotion. She told the Subcommittee:

Once bypassed for rank, it is nearly impossible to recover. The later boards chose not to promote me and I was forced to retire well below the rank that I knew I could have achieved if sexual harassment had not been a driving Coast Guard force against women and still is today.

An additional whistleblower experienced immediate career retaliation after making a report of sexual harassment. After making her report, she was informed she "was being removed from [her] assignment and receiving negative evaluations that would also remove [her] recommendation for advancement" because she allegedly "acted u[n]professionally during the [harassment] incident." She also was reportedly disciplined for specific actions that had previously been rewarded and earned her a special duty assignment. When she sought to understand why her scores were being lowered on her performance evaluations, the members who counseled her allegedly "refused to answer numerous questions [she] had in regard to them lowering [her] evaluations and told [her] to submit a FOIA request if [she] wanted the answers."

Another whistleblower who suffered numerous injuries during an attack, including a displaced pelvis, ribs, and vertebra, bruised rib and tailbone, and a strained shoulder, reportedly faced retaliation in her assignments. Despite her injuries, she was assigned to overnight duty and was told "this was [her] problem and if [she] didn't want to stand duty[, she needed to] find coverage."

e. Coast Guard leadership discouraged active duty members from reporting

At least four active duty whistleblowers reported being discouraged from reporting by Coast Guard leadership, again echoing the experiences of Academy cadets.

After experiencing multiple instances of sexual assault and harassment during nearly two decades of Coast Guard service, one whistleblower recalled to the Subcommittee her devastation when the senior Coast Guard leaders she worked for prioritized protecting another senior leader accused of sexual harassment.

[M]ultiple junior enlisted women bravely came forward to report [REDACTED], made inappropriate and unwelcome advances during what he called "career counseling" sessions. . . . As a member of [REDACTED]

staff at the time, I was devastated by [REDACTED] response and comments expressing that his priority was to not embarrass [REDACTED] or his family. . . . We were ordered not to talk to the media about the incident if they called our office. [REDACTED] was not held accountable, he was protected and enlisted women were shown, like always, that they matter less.

The Subcommittee heard from another whistleblower who, throughout her time at the Academy and her multi-decade active-duty career, repeatedly heard skeptical and hostile statements regarding other women's reports of sexual assault from her peers and command leadership, including senior officers and chiefs. She reported that these statements "had a chilling effect and reinforced my perception that my own character and hard-won professional reputation would be attacked were I to come forward." When she nevertheless reported a superior for sexual harassment and groping while a junior officer, leadership accepted the immediate resignation of the perpetrator instead of calling upon CGIS to investigate the matter further, reportedly "for fear of potentially disrupting ongoing operations and jeopardizing our mission."

Another whistleblower who reported a domestic violence assault was met with similar skepticism and discouragement:

I reported the domestic violence assault, and I was met with questions like "why are you getting a restraining order? Do you really think he's going to do something else?" and told things like . . . "I could be in trouble because it was an inappropriate relationship."

After experiencing months of sexual misconduct, another whistleblower was asked by a superior, who had noticed the situation, if she was being harassed. When she replied in the affirmative, an officer allegedly replied:

"Okay, I want you to think about these men and their careers. They could lose their jobs over this, and you could ruin their lives. And then CGIS (Coast Guard Investigative Services) is going to show up and make you out to be a liar. No one will believe you. Do you want that? I want you to think about all of this before you decide to tell anyone else."

Another whistleblower first realized that the medical treatment that she received was actually sexual assault when a supervisor, seeing her intense discomfort with returning to the medical facility, told her that she must be one of a particular perpetrator's victims

(the perpetrator had abused many women in that facility). She previously had not recognized the treatment as assault or known that her assailant had assaulted so many women. When she had a panic attack, the supervisor reportedly said “that was a while ago, just get over it, he’s gone.” She was not given the opportunity to formally report the assault.

An additional whistleblower faced ridicule after informing a supervisor of his assault—the supervisor allegedly laughed at him and called him slurs because he had been assaulted by another man. He too was never given the opportunity to make a formal report.

f. Active duty victims of sexual misconduct received inadequate medical care

Much like cadets, members of the Coast Guard detailed a medical system that failed to support them in the wake of trauma. Additionally, they reported attempts to weaponize the medical system against them following reporting.

One whistleblower, who is currently serving on active duty, shared with the Subcommittee that they were assaulted three months after graduating from boot camp, more than 20 years ago. The whistleblower recounted that after they recently reached out to the Coast Guard Medical Office for help dealing with trauma:

*. . . the doctor just simply asked me what kind of medication do you want.
 . . . I have no idea?!?! I wasn’t reaching out for medication, I was reaching
 out to talk to someone, to tell someone. To be heard by someone.*

Another whistleblower who reported a sexual assault while serving on active duty felt similarly disserved by the Coast Guard’s medical resources. This whistleblower described the reaction of the clinic as one of “indifference.” According to the whistleblower, the clinic staff acted unaware of the reason he needed to see a medical professional, leading him to conclude that “[y]et again, [he] was on [his] own.”

Commander Jennifer Yount (Ret.), the first woman to command a class of cutter and the second woman to command a U.S. combatant, faced potential dismissal from the Coast Guard via a Medical Board triggered by sexual harassment from her Executive Officer. Commander Yount testified that after experiencing sexual assault and harassment both at the Academy and while on active duty, she disclosed the harassment to a doctor at MacDill Air Force Base. Her reports of sexual harassment were ignored—instead, the

doctor reportedly focused on “improving [Yount’s] coping skills.” Commander Yount received a diagnosis of depression.

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 1991.⁴⁸

The Coast Guard continues to silence and re-traumatize victims of sexual misconduct

The Subcommittee has received reports from whistleblowers that raise serious questions regarding the Coast Guard’s recent actions around sexual misconduct by and against its servicemembers. Whistleblowers who were asked by the Coast Guard to share their stories of misconduct for fleet-wide distribution reported inadequate communication and hesitancy by the Coast Guard to distribute their videos, allegedly because they reflected poorly on the service. Whistleblowers also allege that the Coast Guard has failed to adequately communicate with them—both during Operation Fouled Anchor and in response to their requests for records—thus furthering their trauma and preventing them from accessing care.

These reports call into question the modern Coast Guard’s capacity to foster an environment intolerant of sexual assault and harassment and interact with survivors without causing them additional trauma.

a. The Coast Guard has silenced survivors of assault without offering an explanation

Several survivors of sexual assault in the Coast Guard report having been approached by the Coast Guard to film videos about their experiences. These survivors told their stories on camera and provided feedback in a question-and-answer setting. They were told that these videos would be used as a fleet-wide training tool during Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

The Coast Guard delayed the release of these videos, only releasing them after portions had been made public by one of the survivors, and doing so with little context or notification to Coast Guard members. One survivor described disappointment with the Coast Guard's delay:

The other survivors were perfectly fine with our stories being released, which is why we recorded them in the first place. It was apparent that our voices were being silenced.

While the survivors were never given a formal explanation regarding the initial decision to delay releasing the videos, one whistleblower reported hearing that the Coast Guard was concerned about potential damage to its image from their release:

Many of the details of our stories were mishandled or not properly reported when they occurred. If the Coast Guard were to release these stories investigations would be triggered and the image of the Coast Guard would be tarnished.

The Subcommittee has obtained a document supporting this contention, in which the details of the video program and its outcome are discussed. This document describes a series of concerns with releasing the videos, including increased and unwelcome Congressional attention and a fear that the videos would "continue to exacerbate the narrative being advanced by some that the Coast Guard is in a sexual assault crisis now."⁴⁹ The document states that its author "does not recommend sharing these videos widely."

b. The Coast Guard has repeatedly failed to communicate properly with victims of sexual misconduct

Whistleblowers continue to feel wronged by the Coast Guard's communication. The Subcommittee has received reports from at least ten whistleblowers of recent incidents in which they have felt underserved and retraumatized by interactions with the Coast Guard regarding (1) the Operation Fouled Anchor investigation, (2) access to veterans benefits and services, and (3) attempts to access their files.

⁴⁹ *Id.*

i. **The victim outreach associated with Operation Fouled Anchor was inadequate and retraumatizing**

As a part of the Operation Fouled Anchor investigation, the Coast Guard offered each potential victim the opportunity for an in-person briefing.⁵⁰ The Coast Guard stated that during these briefs each victim was offered an apology, information on their case disposition, information on available support services, and the opportunity to provide feedback and ask questions.⁵¹

Many individuals that spoke with the Subcommittee were contacted by CGIS as part of the OFA investigation, and several were unhappy with the outreach they received. One whistleblower was reportedly asked by CGIS to contact her assailant in an attempt to elicit an admission of sexually assaulting her. This whistleblower, who told the Subcommittee that she had been sexually assaulted at the Academy in the mid-1990s, stated:

[T]hey told me they wanted to do a "sting" operation where I would call [REDACTED] on a burner phone and on a recorded conversation try and get him to admit what he did to me or others. . . . He was suspicious about the call immediately, he didn't admit to anything (which I didn't think he would), he asked all kinds of personal questions like where did I live, if I was married, did I have kids (which made me feel horribly uncomfortable).

The whistleblower expressed concerns that this "sting operation" could make her a target for retaliation by the assailant.

I voiced my concern about what position that would put me, but my safety was disregarded. . . . Once CGIS got around to interviewing him he put two and two together and even commented on that is what the phone call with me was about. I asked for a Military Protective Order to be put in place. . . . [W]hen I shared those concerns, I was told that he wouldn't do that. . . . My safety has ultimately and permanently been compromised and I will be forever looking over my shoulder.

⁵⁰ U.S. Coast Guard, Memorandum: 'Fouled Anchor' Investigation – Final Report, 5, (Jan. 31, 2020), https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/documents/FOULED_ANCHOR_INVESTIGATION_FINAL_REPORT_AND_ENCLOSURE-508Compliant.pdf.

⁵¹ *Id.*

Another whistleblower shared that she was sexually harassed at the Academy and sexually assaulted multiple times on active duty. Despite being interviewed as part of OFA, she was never officially notified about the results of the investigation. Instead, the whistleblower allegedly saw documents related to her case aired on CNN during its coverage of OFA.

Even for those who were not a part of the OFA investigation, the reporting around the investigation prompted difficult conversations. One whistleblower told the Subcommittee that she was sexually assaulted twice at the Academy and sexually harassed while on active duty. This whistleblower kept her assaults secret for over 20 years. After reading about OFA, she spoke to her best friend from the Academy. The whistleblower stated:

I opened up to her about what had happened to me and she shared with me that she too had been assaulted. We both apologized to each other for not being there to support one another. It was then that reality sunk in for both of us. Although we were best friends at the time, we both were too scared to speak up, report our assaults, and share our stories with others. We feared that we would not be believed, we would be disciplined in some way or we would be ultimately forced out of the service. We were together in friendship, but alone with our secret because we were scared that we would lose everything that we had worked for to achieve.

ii. The Coast Guard failed—and continues to fail—to provide sexual misconduct victims access to services

Shannon Norenberg, the former Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (“SARC”) at the Academy, has raised concerns about the Coast Guard’s failure to provide Operation Fouled Anchor survivors with documentation necessary to access U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (“VA”) benefits. She alleges that the Coast Guard withheld these forms because, had they been issued, they would have been entered into the centralized reporting database and therefore become visible to Congress at a time when the Coast Guard was attempting to hide Operation Fouled Anchor:

To prevent Operation Fouled Anchor from being discovered by Congress, Coast Guard leaders deliberately withheld VA military sexual trauma benefits and services from the survivors we were sent around to meet with.

*Worse, we offered them absolutely nothing to replace those lost benefits and services. We just left the victims to fend for themselves.*⁵²

Ms. Norenberg alleges that Operation Fouled Anchor survivors still have not received the support they need to access the full range of VA services and therefore that the fallout of the Operation Fouled Anchor coverup continues.

The Subcommittee has similarly heard from both OFA and non-OFA whistleblowers that they did not receive the necessary paperwork needed to access full services and are struggling to rectify the situation. One whistleblower who separated from the Coast Guard in the 2020s following gender-based discrimination was left without options:

[T]he Coast Guard failed to process me out . . . and I was left without my separation paperwork needed to move on and access veteran services. I was told to leave without my discharge paperwork and I did so. For months I contacted the Coast Guard and my unit requesting my [documents]. I explained that without the [documents] I was limited from accessing VA health care and mental health care, was unable to apply to veterans preference government civilian jobs, and unable to use time sensitive programs designed for recently separated veterans.

This whistleblower is reportedly still waiting for the paperwork necessary to transition to a civilian life. Another whistleblower who experienced multiple sexual assaults while serving in the Coast Guard in the 1970s is seeking to update her VA disability status to reflect those assaults—something she reported not being given the opportunity to do in the decades prior.

iii. The Coast Guard withheld victim records

Whistleblowers recounted difficulty obtaining their full records from their time within the Coast Guard and at the Academy.

⁵² Shannon Norenberg, *The Coast Guard Used Me to Lie to Victims of Sexual Assault at the Coast Guard Academy as Part of their Operation Fouled Anchor Coverup. I Can No Longer Be Part of this System*, June 9, 2024, see <https://www.maritimelegalaid.com/coast-guard/the-coast-guard-used-me-to-lie-to-victims-of-sexual-assault-at-the-coast-guard-academy-operation-fouled-anchor>.

Caitlin Maro testified that she eventually obtained some of her cadet file after being required to submit a Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA") request, however, "[i]t was clear that there was a lot missing." The last page of the file produced to Maro by the Academy was an email, which she described to the Subcommittee:

[The email] was from the then-civilian professor that I confided in to my company Commander. . . . [The professor] called me unstable. . . . [A]t the bottom there is a handwritten note from my company Commander . . . saying, 'This turned out not to be about sexual harassment, but a dispute with her 1st class division lead who wouldn't let her boyfriend study with her during study hour.' My company Commander who wrote that note never talked to me about this . . .

Another whistleblower recounted that after her assault, her mother called the Academy regularly attempting to obtain her records. The whistleblower went on convalescence leave after the assault. She reported that during this time she was unable to access her Coast Guard records, which prevented her from receiving the care she needed. After leaving the Academy, the whistleblower reported that she was unable to obtain her academic transcripts. She was forced to address this obstacle by attending a university where she had been pre-accepted prior to attending the Academy. She reported that she was only able to receive mental health care once she was enrolled in another university.

A whistleblower who gave videotaped statements as part of an investigation into his report of sexual assault while an active duty member was later denied access to complete versions of the video statements and interview notes. Without those records, he was unable to verify which shipmates he had told CGIS may have information about the case in those initial interviews, and therefore unable to robustly pursue the case when it was reopened years later.

A culture that fosters sexual misconduct also creates an environment ripe for a variety of other abuses

The cultural issues highlighted by whistleblowers as enabling sexual misconduct—silencing and shaming of victims—are also implicated in reports of other types of abuse. An environment hostile to reporting can lead to the proliferation of a variety of abuses.

In 2019, the House Committee on Oversight and Reform and the House Committee on Homeland Security investigated the Coast Guard and Academy's handling of harassment allegations and examined whether the Academy successfully created an inclusive environment for a diverse student body.⁵³ In a joint report, the committees concluded that Coast Guard leadership failed to both investigate harassment and institute adequate policies to combat harassment.⁵⁴ Many of the cultural failures detailed in that report—lack of prompt, thorough, and impartial investigations, retaliation against people reporting harassment, lack of accountability for perpetrators, and inadequate policies—echo the whistleblowers from whom this Subcommittee has heard.

A whistleblower who served in the Coast Guard for over twenty years reported severe retaliation following her reporting of race, sexual orientation, and gender-based discrimination at the Academy. She stated,

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.

The Subcommittee has also heard multiple reports of the Coast Guard's inadequacies in combatting domestic violence. A whistleblower who was a victim of domestic violence at the hands of a fellow Coast Guard member spoke about how the Coast Guard repeatedly failed to protect her and hold her abuser accountable. Despite her perpetrator being found guilty of assault in a civilian court, there being two witnesses to the incident, and the perpetrator having a record of similar behavior with a prior partner, he was reportedly never subject to any kind of accountability within the Coast Guard. Instead, he was permitted to remain in the Coast Guard until the end of his enlistment. The survivor's only recourse was a military protective order that the Coast Guard allegedly failed to enforce, even when confronted with evidence of the perpetrator violating it.

⁵³ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Oversight and Reform and Committee on Homeland Security, *Righting the Ship: The Coast Guard Must Improve its Processes for Addressing Harassment, Bullying, and Retaliation*, 116th Cong., 1st sess., Dec. 11, 2019, <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-oversight.house.gov/files/RTS%20Final%20Report.pdf>.

⁵⁴ *Id.* at 3-4.

The Coast Guard's mishandling sexual misconduct is a problem of the present

Throughout the Subcommittee's investigation, it has become clear that the Coast Guard believes the problem of mishandled sexual assault and harassment cases is one of the past. Those very words—"[p]roblem is one of the past"—were handwritten by then-Vice Commandant Admiral Charles Ray alongside a pros and cons list for disclosing Operation Fouled Anchor to Congress.⁵⁵ Through conversations with numerous whistleblowers, however, the Subcommittee has learned that the problem is very much one of the present.

a. Whistleblowers describe a culture that remains tolerant of sexual misconduct

The Subcommittee has heard from at least six whistleblowers who have experienced or witnessed sexual misconduct either in the fleet or at the Academy since 2020. Many of these whistleblowers have all-too-familiar stories about their perpetrators escaping accountability and they themselves experiencing retaliation and feeling forced out of the service. After making a report of sexual harassment in 2022, one whistleblower was informed that she "acted u[n]professionally during the [harassment] and . . . was being removed from [her] assignment and receiving negative evaluations that would also remove [her] recommendation for advancement." She received a similar punishment to the perpetrator of the harassment—a punishment she would not have received if not for reporting the harassment.

A whistleblower who, until recently, served as a Victim Advocate described the modern system's failures:

Over my decade as a Victim Advocate I thought I was doing good, helping victims navigate the system, provide them support, advocate to get their voices heard. However, case after case I learned that the leadership did not value the victims over the perpetrators.

⁵⁵ Letter from Chair Richard Blumenthal and Ranking Member Ron Johnson, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, to Admiral Linda Fagan, Commandant of U.S. Coast Guard, Feb. 14, 2024, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024.02.14-Letter-from-Blumenthal-and-Johnson-to-Fagan-Redacted.pdf>.

This whistleblower told the Subcommittee that none of the victims she supported in her decade as a Victim Advocate felt as though the Coast Guard reporting system provided meaningful justice. She eventually “stopped [being a Victim Advocate] due to failing to feel like [she] was actually making an impact:”

I decided to no longer be a VA because it felt like a lot of work with little to no benefit. I wasn't able to help any member find resolution, I felt like I was just hearing horror stories with no glimmer of hope or accountability. Secondary trauma as a VA is real, the feeling of helplessness when working with a Victim, advocating for trainings Commands don't care to require, and spending hours on additional training to stay up to date and qualified don't feel worthwhile when you[r] role as a VA doesn't seem valued.

At least three whistleblowers who each served for over 20 years described the commonalities between the Coast Guard they initially joined and that from which they retired. They described an organization that remained consistently rife with sexual misconduct across their years of service. In the words of one:

During my 25 years of service, I was assigned to twelve different duty stations across the country. . . . I can say with absolute certainty that at every single duty station I was assigned to that I either personally experienced bullying, hazing, and harassment or either bore witness to or learned of others being treated inappropriately or unfairly. These forms of harassment include but are not limited to sexual assault.

A second whistleblower echoed these sentiments:

I am heartbroken the Coast Guard had 24 years during my career to fix their 'culture'. This 'culture' did not change from the moment I attended bootcamp until I retired. . . . We are now on the 3rd or even 4th generation of females serving in the Coast Guard, and this 'culture' is still not a priority. When will the Coast Guard make changing their 'culture' a priority?

One of these whistleblowers acknowledged the unusual position she occupies—in a service where, so often, survivors of assault and harassment are forced out, it is unusual for a survivor to have served for decades and seen the cultural failures persist over time.

b. Whistleblowers raise concerns over the Coast Guard's policies and systems for preventing sexual misconduct

A number of whistleblowers have reported concerns with the Coast Guard's modern policies and practices around sexual assault and harassment. A whistleblower who served as a Victim Advocate for over ten years detailed the shortcomings of the official apparatus around sexual misconduct reporting. She reported that Victim Advocates are volunteers who do their advocacy work in addition to their official duties—rather than being assigned their victim support work, it is a “collateral duty” that they are forced to fit around their primary responsibilities. Additionally, she identified the rotation schedule of Special Victims Counsels (“SVCs”) as problematic. Because SVCs rotate through the role in tours of two to three years, the whistleblower believes they are not experts in the dynamics of sexual assault investigation and therefore not fully equipped for the intricacies of the role.⁵⁶

Another whistleblower drew a connection between career concerns for leadership and discouragement of reporting, alleging that, because sexual misconduct complaints at a unit reflect poorly on commanders, leadership is not incentivized to diligently record and investigate complaints.

A whistleblower reported frustration around the Coast Guard's definitions of conduct and, in her view, lesser processes in place for those cases that are not considered sexual misconduct. If an incident allegedly fails to “meet[] the criteria for sexual assault/harassment[,] . . . the case is deferred to a unit level investigation” where “members who reported feel like their voice would not be heard over the accused since the accused usually had high standing in the Command.” In describing the resolution of cases that don't fit into the Coast Guard's sexual misconduct definitions, one whistleblower summarized:

Things like “they are a really great worker” tends to carry more weight than the fact that they promote a toxic work environment for others.

⁵⁶ Defense Advisory Comm. on Investigation, Prosecution, and Defense of Sexual Assault in the Armed Forces, *Report on Tour Lengths and Rating Chain Structure for Services' Special Victims' Counsel / Victims' Legal Counsel (SVC/VLC) Programs*, August 10, 2022, https://dacipad.whs.mil/images/Public/08-Reports/10-DAC-IPAD_SVC-VLC_Report_20220815_Final_Complete.pdf. See Appendix P. Coast Guard Special Victims' Counsel (SVC) Program.

Other whistleblowers echoed concerns about the rigidity of misconduct definitions. One whistleblower reported that, because servicemembers are not deeply steeped in the definitions, they often do not know how to report their experiences in a way that adequately fulfills the requirements. The Coast Guard then will reportedly not file the report, which, according to the whistleblower, is often devastating to victims' credibility in the unit.

Definitional rigidity also reportedly stands in the way of victims accessing services. A whistleblower who, alongside several other women, had been stalked and falsely accused of having inappropriate relationships by a perpetrator reported being told that, because the conduct did not fit in the Coast Guard's definition of sexual harassment, she was not entitled to services.

Another whistleblower reported that narrow definitions have created holes in the support system for certain victims of domestic violence. The Coast Guard has reportedly failed to adopt the new Department of Defense definition of "dating partner," which closes the so-called "boyfriend loophole" and expands the category to include all romantic and intimate partners (previously, it encompassed only current and former spouses, current and former cohabitants, and people who share a child in common).⁵⁷ Because dating partners are reportedly not considered intimate partners, per the Coast Guard, dating partner victims allegedly sometimes fail to receive domestic violence support services.

Whistleblowers expressed a desire to improve the Coast Guard and a belief that meaningful change is possible

Many of the whistleblowers who reached out to the Subcommittee expressed their love for the Coast Guard and a desire to see the culture around sexual assault and harassment improved. They report complicated and conflicting feelings of pride and betrayal. A whistleblower who served in the Coast Guard for nearly three decades shared:

I love the Coast Guard. . . . There are so many incredible people in the Coast Guard, serving for the right reasons. Unfortunately, the malignant sub-culture continues and those who don't rock the boat and don't stand up to the bullies for what's right, get promoted. We must do better if we

⁵⁷ 10 U.S.C. § 928b(b).

want a full workforce who trusts the organization to take care of them when they need it the most.

Commander Jennifer Yount told the Subcommittee that her testimony was motivated by both her “love for the Coast Guard” and her “anger and frustration.” Lieutenant Melissa McCafferty told members of the Subcommittee:

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.⁵⁸

Conclusion

The Subcommittee has heard from more than 80 whistleblowers, who together have made clear the need for immediate change both at the Academy and in the Coast Guard. Their stories detail systemic sexual assault and harassment, including a culture of silencing, retaliation, and failed accountability. Although Operation Fouled Anchor initially brought these problems to light, they span both the Academy and the Fleet—the Coast Guard as a whole must work to build a culture in which everyone is safe, respected, and valued.

The Subcommittee is deeply grateful to all of the whistleblowers who have bravely shared their stories. We thank you for your service, your sacrifice, and your incredible courage.

⁵⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate, Permanent Subcomm. on Investigations, *Coast Guard Academy Whistleblowers: Stories of Sexual Assault and Harassment*, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., Dec. 12, 2023, S. Hrg. 335-224, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/subcommittees/investigations/hearings/coast-guard-academy-whistleblowers-stories-of-sexual-assault-and-harassment/>.

Statement for the Record of Catherine Hebert

My name is Catherine Herbert.

I joined the Coast Guard in 2017. I was never someone who fit a military mold and prior to joining I did not take direction or orders well. If I wasn't good at something the first time I never tried a second time, and the words "I can't" were a part of my daily vocabulary. At the advice of my husband and after many conversations over the years about the pros and cons of joining the CG I decided "I can". With my husband's help I trained physically and mentally for weeks before basic training. He would quiz me, and tell me stories and reassure me when I would get nervous and want to "I can't" my way out of it. But I could, and I did, and I was so proud. It was the first thing in my life that I was proud of. Before joining I was a high school drop out and worked a handful of odd jobs where the dealings and the crowd I was around weren't exactly respectable and as a result I experienced the sort of treatment a young woman might expect. So not only was this my first and only real accomplishment, this was a clean slate because now I'm a member of the United States Coast Guard and I just spent 8 weeks earning my protection, my safety, and my respect. I would never be treated now the way I was treated then. I'm SAFE now.

Beaming with pride I left Cape May and reported to my first duty station COMMCOM in Chesapeake, VA. When I reported, anytime I was asked "You making a career out of it?" the answer was always yes, without a second thought. As a non rate, I was asked that question often. As I'm sure was the case for every other non rate at their first unit. Without question I was giving the service 20 years of my life. This was where I wanted to be, this was a level of safety, security and community that I had never experienced and was not prepared to give up. To go back to what? Being groped by kitchen staff for \$2 an hour? No way. There was a dignity I found in the service that I hadn't been able to find anywhere else before. Until suddenly that dignity took a hit when I was specifically requested to scrub boot polish out of a warrant officers carpet while he and another stood over me and told me how I "looked so good on my hands and knees". A few months later, now standing watch on the OPS Deck, with new leadership, It felt like another fresh start when my then Senior Chief asked me that one special question "You making a career out of it?" I responded the same as I always did, "oh definitely". He followed up with questions about my husband, his rate and rank, how long he'd been in and so on, seemingly innocent, until it became apparent from my husband's time in service that there was a significant age gap which prompted Senior Chief to respond with "Wow, you must feel like new". And now I'm my 17 year old self working with a bunch of perverts again, but this time I can't fight back, I can't say anything, I can't do anything, and I can't even get away.

These two comments are the most notable of many similar comments directed at me at my careers start. Not because they were worse than anything I'd ever experienced before, but because this was a deep betrayal to me as a new Coastie and personally, as a young woman. As a Coastie it was disheartening to hear CG leadership, people who I held in such high esteem and who I admired make comments that sounded so similar to the comments made by felons and scam artists that I worked with in a dirty call center years before. And as a young woman, it was incredibly distressing having to face the reality that the safety I thought I earned wasn't real after all. That no matter how pristine, clean, respectable I could make myself, that safety and decency

would always be just out of reach. These two comments caused a major shift in my perception of the service and of myself. I was supposed to be safe now.

After about a year standing watch at COMMCOM and living in Elizabeth City, NC where my husband worked at the Air Station I became more and more depressed. Filled with feelings of regret for joining, invaluable, overworked, unappreciated, lonely and home sick. I felt trapped having left the big city to live in the sticks and work a job where I didn't have the freedom I was used to in my past life. Life was becoming very dark for me. So when the news came that I received orders to OS "A" School in Petaluma and that my husband was being short toured, and that we would be starting our new life in Mobile, AL we were beside ourselves. I will never forget the day my husband came home from work and ran up the stairs to our bedroom, eyes welling up, and told me "we got Mobile!". It was no Hawaii, but we couldn't have been happier. Here was our second chance at a happy life. Mobile was my salvation.

I reported to Sector Mobile Command Center in October 2019 with high hopes and the belief that my experience at COMMCOM was a one off. I wish I could go back in time and scream at my younger self to run, run as fast as you can. I was not only failed by leadership on multiple fronts, I was actively hunted by leadership during my tour. This is something we hear far too often in the recaps of other survivors following their reports of sexual assault or harassment. In my case however, I was actively hunted by my command prior to my report and even prior to my assaults. My assaults, harassment, maltreatment and overall abuse was a RESULT of my commands actions against me. As I said, I was never cut from the military cloth and because of that I struggled at the beginning of my tour and my chief at the time was less than forgiving. In addition to not being awarded the guidance that incoming service-members were awarded in their adjustments, I was held to a much higher standard and punished at a much higher degree for minor infractions that were often overlooked or even embraced when done by others. This pattern was inescapable, I managed to make an ever lasting reputation for myself that far surpassed the confines of the command center thanks to my Chief. I was being harassed and targeted by department heads that I'd never even spoken to. I had to repair my reputation from day one with no allies, no one to vouch for me or my character and I remained alone and seemingly radioactive for the first year of my time in the CC. Despite my instant character assassination I was determined to prove my critics wrong. I volunteered for everything I could, I decorated the CC for every holiday, I cooked for the watch crew regularly, covered watches last minute, stayed late of my own volition, trained new 3rds while on liberty, I was stellar at my job, I took pride in it, I loved my job. In spite of my treatment, I loved my job. In spite of my tears and thoughts of suicide that came with every commute home, I loved my job.

Though I loved the work I did, it took an enormous emotional toll on me. I could never desensitize the nature of search and rescue. When we had a good day, it was a great day. The feeling of knowing my expertise aided in a life saved made all the bad just float away. But when a life was lost, I carried that weight for days, sometimes weeks. The job in itself is credited with being extremely high stress by definition. And it was. This occupational hazard was topped with relentless attacks from my command. I couldn't seem to make it stop. I couldn't be good enough at my job, quiet enough, focused enough. Every positive was ignored and every negative was amplified. Very quickly I found myself hiding in the bathroom or faking busy when leadership came into the workspace because without fail, I would be punished or reprimanded for what

seemed like my mere existence. This became something of a running joke in the command center, a joke that ran for years. That every time an outsider came into the command center, within 5 minutes of their departure I'd be getting counseled. It was apparent to everyone, including a few people in my chain of command who made their best effort to shield me from these unwarranted attacks. These attacks continued and became more aggressive as time went by. So severely that the careers of those who shielded me became at risk.

I was carrying the weight of hearing peoples last words while having to dodge daggers from the people I should have been able to lean on. This theme remained constant, progressively worsening. Every breathe I took was intensely examined for the presence of misconduct, and no matter how hard they looked it wasn't there. They hated me, but I wasn't breaking a rule, and so the microscope remained, and they became more and more determined, more aggressive in their hunt. They HAD to be right about me, I had to be the bad guy. I was not allowed a moment of peace, so neither was anyone who tried to protect me. And there went my shields. They became worn and angry and frustrated with me, because they constantly had to fight for me, they were accused of bias and having inappropriate sexual relationships with me. Anyone who showed me kindness or compassion was punished for it. Until I was alone. I was denied awards that were written for me, I was not considered for recognition for fear that my receiving recognition would put my leaderships' careers at risk or be cause for rumors, I was threatened with having my advancement taken away. I was punished to an extreme and treated like a criminal and yet I had no performance record to support this. This treatment was personal. They wanted to punish me, they wanted me to do something wrong so badly, and because I didn't, I had to be punished off the record. I went to work terrified, anxious, walking on eggshells, distraught and alone. I begged to just be left alone. Just let me do my job. My job was the only thing that could, on a good day, fill me up. That was where my peace was, that was where my pride and sense of purpose and accomplishment was. The only thing that kept me alive was my part in saving the life of another. I just wanted to be left alone.

And while I worked my high stress job, while under attack myself, hanging on by a thread, my marriage crumbling, my desperate fight to not end my life, every single day, I was being groped, choked, threatened, blackmailed, and stalked by a superior who was handed the opportunity on a silver platter. My chiefs personal vendetta against me was so successful that it directly resulted in my years of sexual abuse and emotional torment. This was so much more detrimental than a predator seeing an opportunity. It was a predators dreams. My assailant maintained an image as "my only ally" in an environment where it was so well known that I was not safe with my command, so as time passed, anyone who wanted to help me knew not to go to my command, they went to him. When people were concerned about my well being, they told the man who was assaulting me. I was trapped. I had no where to turn. He knew that anyone who could help would not help, and anyone who cared would turn to him. Only one attempt at a rescue was made, I didn't even say his name, I told another superior in a moment of extreme distress "People put their hands on me here" he responded with "I'd say you could call me to vent but my wife thinks you're a whore". The "Don't be the last one with a secret" standard within the Coast Guard encouraged this member to pass along what ultimately became a warning directly to my assailant. The following morning my husband and I received multiple anonymous threatening emails if I said any more. I had to play nice with my assailant for years, because I wasn't just his victim, I was his prisoner. I cried out for help a handful of times over the years, to a handful of

people, but quickly rescinded, begged people to forget it, begged people to not report anything. I wasn't just playing nice with my assailant and not addressing the abuse, I had to carefully navigate my survival with a man who knew exactly what he was doing, he knew that I knew what he was doing, he knew I attempted to seek help, and he continued the abuse. There was no dispute in intent or miscommunication. He watched me survive him. He didn't stop, he didn't get ahead of it, he liked that I didn't want it, he liked knowing that I was scared, and he reveled in the security that any call for rescue would go unanswered.

This was a danger I never could have imagined when I joined the Coast Guard. This was where I was supposed to be safe. This was a danger unlike anything I had experienced before. In the past, the bad guys looked like bad guys, and I was prepared, I knew what to expect and I could escape. This danger was concealed by the uniform I was taught to trust. By the uniform I was told as a child to go find in an emergency. A uniform associated with safety and decency. The uniform that I put so much faith in took everything from me. Every day they could see I was nothing more than skin and bones, I had nothing left, the vultures kept picking. I was shown no mercy. I had no choice but to stay alive through all of this. To keep smiling, laughing, working my hardest, desperately seeking approval, desperately seeking to earn the safety I thought I earned in Cape May. I tried for as long as I could, until it got too dark to find anything left to live for I didn't seek help anymore, I made peace with the only escape I had. With little hope, I made a deal with myself that on my next duty day I was going to tell my watch team that I planned to commit suicide. Sure to avoid the assumption that this was dark humor, as is common in this line of work, especially in Search and Rescue. I was quite literally putting my life in the hands of my command, I made sure to be loud and clear. I made sure my cry for help couldn't be mistaken. This was my last attempt at survival

It was a night watch with a crew of 3 members who knew me far too well to make any mistake about what I'd soon share with them. Just 2 hours into the 12 hour night watch I just came out with it, openly to the watch floor. At first there was laughter, so I repeated more than once. Until the laughter faded and the discomfort set in. There was no room for confusion with dark humor. Two of them sat silent, confused and uncomfortable. I made it clear this was not a joke, I went as far as telling them that they should call someone. I made it as clear as I could. Again and again met with

"I know your joking, stop" I responded "How do you know?" tears running down my face. How do you know it's a joke, how could you know? Having shown all the signs, having had my abuse in the spotlight for so long, having checked every box. How could you know?

Knowing my fate, still I waited, sat silently the rest of the night, I lay awake in bed that morning, waiting. I was sure someone would at least come check, talk to me, text me after watch, maybe a phone call but it never came. I saw it on their faces, they knew it was real, they knew. Their expressions and the clear internal conflict will forever be burned into my memory. I begged with everything I had left in me for reprieve. This solidified that what I was experiencing far surpassed that of a "tarnished reputation". This was maltreatment to the highest degree. I wasn't tarnished. I was radioactive. Anyone who showed me humanity, kindness, salvation would be punished. They knew this was real, they knew I meant it and still I was too dangerous to save. My LITERAL life was not worth the price they'd have to pay for trying to save it.

The Coast Guard is solely responsible for every ounce of abuse I endured. I was targeted by Coast Guard Leadership so severely that it DIRECTLY resulted in YEARS of criminal and inhumane treatment. The sexual abuse that I experienced takes a back seat to the irrevocable damage that the Coast Guard has caused. I wasn't simply the casualty of a toxic command. Those years were spent watching leadership turn over and change of command time and time again. This repeated cycle of new leadership came with hope followed by ultimate disappointment and abandonment. This pattern of negligence is difficult to make sense of with no motive. The toxic command is gone, these people don't know me, so why? Neglect at this scale with no motive can only indicate a massive systemic deficiency, a deep moral rot. Moral rot is NOT only a permeation of malice and evil, but also in weakness and laziness. Weak leaders allowed my abuse to continue simply because it was too much trouble to stop it. The deep moral ROT also contributed to a deep moral ABSENCE. Because of this moral absence from each new command, I was left to fend for myself.

I spent years watching that rescue bird fly over me, praying for the life saving that never came. I was sector mobile command centers unanswered mayday call.

Weak leaders filled the gaps that evil leaders didn't. Weak leaders have let me take responsibility for their misconduct to protect their careers, Weak leaders have asked me to report abuse and misconduct to other supervisors and to keep their receipt of the initial report a secret. Weak leaders refused to address retaliatory harassment and abuse. Weak leaders have promised reprieve and abandoned me at the first sign of push back. Weak leaders witnessed and knew of my abuse and never offered intervention. I kept secrets for and lied to protect the senior leaders who were aware of my assaults and failed to act. I have taken verbal lashings for misconduct by the hands of senior leaders to save their spotless records. I used my damaged reputation to save WEAK leaders that should have been saving me.

My orders to Sector Mobile were symbolic of my chance at the life I prayed for. Instead, I was abused, shown no mercy, and denied sanctuary at every turn. The Coast Guard is infected by corruption, weakness, self preservation, and career fear that supports the near criminal evolution of a bystander effect seen at the academy over two decades ago into present day throughout the service. A systemic deficiency that resulted in a hundred service members whispering to each other "someone should help her" while doing nothing at all.

On August 29th 2022, my birthday, I was recalled from leave after my assailants shared intimate photos of me with my coworkers and chief. My chief shared these photos and gave instructions on how to find them to others. Having kept silent for years praying that if I could assure my abusers that they were safe, that I wouldn't say anything; I hoped maybe they would stop. It was now clear that this wasn't a matter of my surrender or silence, I was being hunted for sport and I wouldn't be free until my head was on their wall. There was just something about the innocence and childlike joy associated with a BIRTHDAY that added that extra layer of inhumanity for me. As childish as it feels to express, without conscious consideration, I guess I just felt like that's the one day nothing REALLY bad could happen to you. It just hurt more, maybe because it was unexpected. I finally had enough. I asked my chief to speak privately to which she responded "Anything you have to say you can say right here" on the watch floor with crew present. Again, pressing the importance of privacy, my request was denied. It wasn't until I finally broke, spilling my years of abuse out in front of everyone and my desire to officially report, that my

request for privacy was granted. She shuffled me into her office, grabbing at me, panicking, whispering, as if trying to hush a child's temper tantrum in a library. Which wasn't too far off, I was hyperventilating, and the more she tried to quiet me the louder I got. I was reminded to maintain my military bearing, respect my superiors, I was told I should be careful because I could "get in trouble" for the photos she found, I was accused of prostitution and infidelity. Not exactly handled with care.

The initial stages after a report are a blur, being escorted to the command, connected with the SARC, SVC, VA, scheduling interviews and appointments. It feels like you aren't really there. My mind was blank and I felt like I was hovering over myself just watching. When the dust settled a bit and the box checking began Deputy called me, patched my CO in, who remained silent after an initial greeting, while deputy conducted the very obviously monotonous task of asking how I was doing. The call was short, not much was said on either side. It just felt cold and like a chore.

From there, began what became a two year investigative and disposition process for which I had very little hope. In hindsight, that phone call was indicative of what to expect throughout this process. My report contained details of Repeated sexual assaults, sexual harassment, revenge porn (unlawful broadcast/distribution of intimate images), blackmail/extortion, stalking, targeting, harassment, and a hostile work environment by three different subjects, a peer, a superior, and a supervisor. Almost instantly the culture of rapid box checking resulted in a tunnel vision on the big ticket item. Every other abuse and every other abuser fell to the side. I asked over and over, what about them, what about this or that and I was ignored. I explained over and over to anyone who would listen the importance of the other details, that everything was intertwined, that each instance of abuse was related to the one before. Aside from each individual and event being a puzzle piece and INTEGRAL to a successful investigation; I was terrified that CGIS, legal and my commands prime focus on the sexual ASSAULT would be how my other abusers evaded accountability for the destruction they caused. I reminded them constantly, I was an investigators dream. I compiled evidence, I gave dates, times, witnesses. I actively advocated for myself, if I was doing this I had to be all in. CGIS completed their investigation in approximately three months, where they interviewed current and past members of the command center as well as retired and separated members from years before. During that period as I continued to work with all three of my abusers, I was sexually harassed by other members as a result of the distribution of my private images, I was the subject of multiple retaliatory reports containing false claims of arrests and prostitution, I was threatened with involuntary psychiatric holds, I received lowered EERs with notes that I didn't "work well with others" and I had my personal belongings removed from my locker, destroyed and thrown in a dumpster. At my attempt to report retaliation to my command I was counseled for "talking about an open investigation".

The retaliation and silencing continued for the remainder of my time at Sector Mobile, where my abusers continued to advance and receive OCS recommendations and awards. I was left in the dark waiting for justice with only a monthly update that legal was still "working". Every 30 days, pacing by the phone for a year and a half. After all this time and pain and stress and being asked to trust the process time and time again they tossed everything out like it was nothing. Like the years long trauma I have to work everyday to survive meant nothing. The only accountability I

was to be awarded was a charge for sexual harassment for only one individual and I managed to make peace with that, whatever I could get. This single charge for this one individual was supposed remedy the years of abuse I endured at the hand of multiple people, and even that was taken from me. They dropped the charge citing an imaginary statute of limitations. Again, just skin and bones, the vultures picked. That dropped sexual harassment charge, my only symbol of justice, wasn't even for my abuse, but for the individuals on the receiving end of sexual and derogatory comments that he made about me as to discredit me. Sector Mobile had taken everything from me and it wasn't enough. They would invent fake "victims" before they would even acknowledge what I endured.

I was a victim of the Coast Guard more than I was of any individual. My case is a result of a cocktail of shortcomings within the service. Inadequate training, desensitization, bias, laziness, weakness and self preservation. Some things amounted to personal vendetta, some were fear of involvement, some a lapse in judgement, and some were honest mistakes but all found resolve in being concealed. Regardless of motive, the missteps in my case, failing to interview the accused, lying about reviewing surveillance footage of crimes, and refusal to uphold whistleblower protection has put more members at risk, set the example for my assailants, and discouraged other victims from coming forward. A common cause and effect seen with each botched case. These failures are not only a detriment to the victim reporting but to the service as a whole.