Dear,

The mission of U.S Merchant Marine Academy has been put in peril by the very people responsible for overseeing its success. Congress, as a principal stakeholder in all federal service academies, should be deeply concerned about what is occurring at USMMA.

**USMMA Failed Re-Accreditation as a College, placed in Warning Status**:

The Academy recently failed to be re-accredited as an institution of higher education (i.e. as a college) by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), the same organization which certifies USMA and USNA. This is an unacceptable and ignominious first for a federal service academy. All deficiencies identified by MSCHE are directly attributable to failures of leadership at the Maritime Administration and the Academy. Pointedly, of the few highlights found in the report, most were regarding the value of the year-long core curriculum midshipmen spend at sea on commercial vessels, commonly referred to as ‘Sea Year’.

**Maritime Administration Created a False Narrative and Misdirection to avoid accountability**:

Instead of directly addressing the shortcomings identified in the report, the Academy and Maritime Administration leadership have invented a counter-narrative centered on false allegations of sexual assault on commercial vessels during Sea Year. Using this false narrative, they claimed the failure of accreditation was due to sexual assault by crewmen on board commercial ships during Sea Year, while curiously stopping short of labeling government ships crews with a similar despicable moniker. The Maritime Administrator then cancelled Sea Year on these ships (there are well over 100 vessels, including those owned by Exxon, Maersk, Crowley and other highly respected companies). **However, state maritime academy students continue to train on these very ships.**

**Maritime Administrator’s action has placed USMMA graduation, reputation, and viability at risk:**

As a result of cancelling Sea Year on commercial vessels, hundreds of midshipmen will be unable to graduate in four years and the Academy’s already withering reputation is in tatters.

**From Maritime Professional Magazine***: Sea time may very soon be the least of any USMMA midshipmen’s problems. You have to wonder whether the school will even exist in 24 months. .A***cta non verba*.*** *Deeds Not Words. That’s the beloved motto of the United States Merchant Marine Academy. It’s a good one. It should apply to everyone. Right about now the midshipmen could use a little more of former, and less of the latter, from leadership that has left a once-proud college rudderless, adrift and in grave danger of foundering.*

***”*8/25/2016 Statement by Congressman Peter King, Chairman USMMA Congressional Board of Visitors:**

 *“…The problems that led to the Academy and Maritime Administration’s decision to temporarily suspend the Sea Year are indicative of leadership problems at the Academy that must be addressed*

**Maritime Administrator has falsely impugned an entire industry as laden with deviants**:

In the process, MARAD and USMMA leadership falsely impugned an entire industry for sexual misconduct, with absolutely no basis whatsoever. The maritime labor unions have united in their support for USMMA Sea Year and their disdain for the repulsive innuendos and comments made by the Maritime Administrator about professional mariners.

**Actual Data:**

The SA/SH data accumulated by the professional surveys at the Academy do not in any way corroborate what the Maritime Administrator is claiming about professional mariners on commercial ships.  It does exactly the opposite.  The data (2014 assault data for example) shows that USMMA midshipmen have issues with the behavior of other midshipmen and government employees (88% of offenders are in that category) while 12% are everyone *not* in that category (neighbor, bartender, whomever). The data in no way whatsoever indicate that professional mariners on board commercial vessels are guilty of MARAD’s abhorrent accusations. *Instead, the data suggests that offenses which occur at sea were perpetrated by other midshipmen or government employees.*

**Every stakeholder group (except three individuals) supports Midshipmen at Sea on Commercial Vessels**:

Perhaps the most compelling fact throughout this entire charade is who supports midshipmen training at sea on commercial vessels versus those who do not.  Supporters includes the SA/SH data itself, midshipmen, faculty, staff, parents, graduates, the accrediting commission MSCHE, the Chairman and members of the USMMA Congressional Board of Visitors, maritime labor unions, the shipping companies, the maritime press, and the six state maritime schools who continue to place their students on these same “unsafe” commercial ships.

**Three Individuals who do not:**

Compare that to who does not support midshipmen on commercial ships - which is three people: Maritime Administrator Paul Jaenichen, USMMA Superintendent James Helis, and USMMA civilian advisory board chairwoman Sharon van Wyk. Note that none of these individuals has any merchant marine experience.  The other common thread for these individuals is their fundamental role in the failure of USMMA to be re-accredited.  Furthermore, they were present at a June 10th, 2016 briefing to Secretary Foxx on why the Academy failed re-accreditation, and it is reported that they blamed Sea Year for the re-accreditation failure. It was at that briefing that Secretary Foxx ordered Sea Year to be cancelled.

**Required Action:**

Two steps are necessary to insure that USMMA regains full accreditation and is once again equipped to meet its mission.

 (1) Sea Year on commercial vessels must be restored immediately. Congress compels commercial shipping companies to take USMMA midshipmen in training so that the midshipmen train on the vessels they will be joining as officers upon graduation. The Secretary must meet this mandate and assign midshipmen to these vessels.

 (2) There must be Congressional oversight into the Academy and Maritime Administration’s path to correct the accreditation deficiencies. If the Academy loses accreditation, it will effectively have to close. Those individuals responsible for this accreditation failure have been in place for four years and have not been held accountable nor replaced with leadership capable of correcting these deficiencies. It is incumbent upon Congress to use legislative authorities to compel the Department of Transportation to take the steps necessary at this critical time for the Academy.

Finally, it is recommended that Congress investigate the actions of the Maritime Administrator, the USMMA Superintendent and the civilian Advisory Board chairwoman in this matter so as to gain insight into what transpired and how it can be prevented from ever being allowed to happen again.

**Request:** I ask that you contact Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx and express your condemnation of what is happening at USMMA, insist that he begin assigning USMMA midshipmen to commercial vessels again, and that he hold the Maritime Administrator and USMMA Superintendent accountable for failing to keep the institution fully accredited and for misleading the public for the reason for that failure.

I also ask that you contact USMMA Congressional Board of Visitors Chairman, Representative Peter King (NY) and offer your support for these actions.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,