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). 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***: Right about now the midshipmen could use a little more [action], and less of [talking], 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*

In the process, MARAD and USMMA leadership falsely impugned an entire industry for sexual misconduct, with absolutely no basis whatsoever.

**Actual Data:** The SA/SH data 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 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**: 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:**  The three individuals directly responsible for the failure of USMMA to be re-accredited, the very same three individuals who falsely claim that commercial sea year was responsible – Maritime Administrator Jaenichen, USMMA Superintendent Helis, and civilian advisory board chairwoman van Wyk.

**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.

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,