



**TESTIMONY OF
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ON

**“The Handling of Bullying, Harassment, and Retaliation at the Coast Guard Academy and
the Response to Disparities Identified in the Equity Scorecard Review”**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND MARITIME SECURITY
AND
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES**

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Introduction

Good morning Chairman Thompson, Chairwoman Maloney, Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Rogers, Ranking Member Roy, and distinguished members of the subcommittees. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Coast Guard Academy’s response to incidents of bullying, harassment, and retaliation, as well as the Academy’s responses to disparities identified in the Equity Scorecard review. As the Deputy Commandant for Mission Support I oversee the Coast Guard Academy and the Human Resources directorate for the Coast Guard Academy, I take these issues very seriously and look forward to discussing the positive steps we have taken.

The Coast Guard is focused on diversity and inclusion, and I share the Commandant’s commitment to championing and maintaining an inclusive organizational climate where everyone feels safe, valued and respected. Sustaining readiness requires a collaborative, cohesive environment where every member has the same opportunity to reach his or her full potential. Simply put, it is a mission imperative, and is vital to the execution of our mission to protect the public, our natural resources, and economic assets.

A healthy organizational climate is free from conduct that unreasonably interferes with an individual’s work performance and prevents an intimidating, offensive or hostile work environment. To create a collaborative and cohesive environment, we must eliminate incidents of harassment, bullying, and retaliation within the Coast Guard. These behaviors erode mission readiness, are in direct violation of our core values of Honor and Respect, and are simply not tolerated in the Coast Guard.

In addition to building a healthy organizational climate, the Coast Guard is committed to professionally responding to and investigating any allegations of harassment, bullying, and retaliation. Commanders are obligated to address and respond properly to every allegation, and we take every opportunity to improve our Service and our response. Our Personnel Readiness Task Force, Affinity Group Council, and multiple stakeholders are working together to identify and implement change.

On June 12, 2019 the Commandant issued *The Coast Guard's Strategic Vision for the Coast Guard Academy*. This vision establishes clear direction to the Superintendent to foster an inclusive environment that enables students and faculty to reach their greatest potential and to facilitate a climate of respect. As part of the strategic plan, within the Mission Support enterprise, we created the DCMS-Deputy for Personnel Readiness (DPR) position. DCMS-DPR is a two-star admiral responsible for oversight of the Human Resource directorate, Force Readiness Command, and the Coast Guard Academy. In addition to the creation of DCMS-DPR, a Coast Guard Academy Program Manager position was created within the Mission Support organization. Additionally, the "Inclusion and Diversity Senior Advisors" group was created and consists of retired Coast Guard Flag Officers and currently serving Coast Guard and DHS Senior Executives. The purpose of these additional positions is to improve oversight at the Coast Guard Academy and to carry out the strategic vision.

Today, the Coast Guard Academy has the most diverse corps and faculty in its 150-year history. In May 2019, the Academy graduated the largest number of Asian American and female African American cadets in its history. Ensuring equitable outcomes for all cadets at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy has been a strategic priority for the institution since 2013. With the endorsement of the Board of Trustees, the Coast Guard Academy became the first federal service academy to undertake a comprehensive examination of the educational and performance outcomes among cadets of different racial, ethnic, and gender groups via the *Equity Scorecard* process developed by the Center for Urban Education (CUE) at the University of Southern California. The Academy worked with CUE for nearly a year to design a project that would meet the unique needs of a service academy. This effort strove to identify equity gaps, and develop innovative and progressive solutions to further improve the culture of respect, inclusivity, and equity-mindedness at the Coast Guard Academy.

Ensuring equitable outcomes for all cadets at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy has been a strategic priority for the institution since 2013. The Equity Scorecard was an action item of the 2013-2018 Strategic Plan. This process began in March 2017, and the Vital Signs Report (VSR) was released in May 2018.

In June 2018, the Superintendent chartered the Equity Task Force (ETF) to begin to address the recommendations of the VSR. The ETF is comprised of five inquiry teams who provide a collaborative and holistic review of the equity gaps revealed by the VSR.

In September 2018, the Coast Guard Academy Data Governance Plan was signed, establishing data management practices, ownership, stewardship, and decision support. Most impressively, the Academy's Institutional Research Division created the Equity Assessment Report (EAR), which mirrors the data tables in the VSR and can be regularly produced. This capability enables faculty and leaders to pull on-demand results to determine the effectiveness of policy, program, and process changes as they relate to cadet outcomes.

To strengthen the cadet academic and social environment, the Coast Guard Academy stood up the Center for Inclusive Learning and Teaching (CILT) in October 2018. The CILT was designed with the goal to widen the academic aperture to a diverse and inclusive pedagogy in all cadet interactions, policies, and evaluations to achieve more equitable outcomes across the race, ethnicity, and gender spectrum. Additionally, the Academy Minority Outreach Team (AMOT) was formalized and is comprised of a group of minority officers who are instrumental in the recruitment and retention of cadets from historically underserved populations.

The VSR is one of many assessment tools used to examine educational outcomes and formulate improvement strategies. Other assessment tools include additional reviews by accrediting bodies, the annual Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute's (DEOMI) Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS), and the biennial Gender Relations Survey. These broad efforts allow the Coast Guard to examine policies, practices and customs to maintain world class programs and meet its mission of graduating leaders of character for the Coast Guard and the nation, while ensuring fair and respectful treatment of all who attend and serve at this prestigious institution.

The DHS Office of Inspector General or OIG is one of many sources of inputs the Coast Guard uses to evaluate efforts to provide an environment in which the Academy's talented cadets and faculty can thrive. In December 2018, the OIG issued a report of investigation (W17-USCG-WPU-16018) responding to a complaint made by a Lieutenant Commander at the Coast Guard Academy.

The report substantiated an allegation that the member received low marks on an officer evaluation report in retaliation for whistleblowing activity, and considered nearly three years of records, as well as multiple personnel interviews. This investigation identified three policy/procedural recommendations, and the following response actions were taken:

- In August 2019, service-wide changes were implemented to the Coast Guard's Civil Rights Awareness Training, to include the requirement that managers and supervisors document their rationale for harassment investigation findings and outcomes. The Coast Guard also revised procedures to require commanders to notify the next level in their chain of command of the findings and outcomes of harassment, hate, hazing, and bullying inquiries.

The Coast Guard supplemented its Civil Rights Awareness Training for supervisors and managers on the agency's discrimination, harassment, and bullying policies, including on how to recognize, process and respond to an allegation and the importance in exercising discretion in communicating about complaints undergoing review. In May 2019, the Coast Guard revised its Civil Rights Manual to clarify that whistleblower complaints should be directed to the OIG. Further, but separate from the recommendations, the new manual states that management officials may not use their authority to take or threaten action against a civilian employee, candidate for civilian employment, or a military member, for making protected communications to a member of Congress, the Inspector General, and others.

The Coast Guard is committed to protecting the rights of its men and women under the Military Whistleblower Protection Act, including the right to communicate with a Member of Congress or the OIG without interference or retaliation. Furthermore, the Coast Guard and the Coast Guard Academy's commitment to improve the climate portrayed in the DHS OIG report is clear, firm, sincere, and enduring.

The Coast Guard requires a system that attracts, includes, and retains a diverse workforce that can lead and operate in an uncertain and complex environment. This system includes implementing proper measures to address, investigate, and resolve incidents of behaviors contrary to the Coast Guard's core values. When reports and allegations of harassment, bullying, and retaliation are made, the Service is dedicated to a swift, professional, and thorough response. As programs mature and cases become more complex, the Coast Guard has adjusted protocol, policies, and training to ensure that it is as responsive as possible.

Closing

The Coast Guard has made significant strides to create lasting change, and is committed to working closely with Congressional members to enhance the climate of the service and its academy. It has been a longstanding initiative to revitalize the Board of Visitors, and we seek your support and an equal commitment to aid in promoting an organization that places a high value on a talented and diverse total workforce.

While the Coast Guard has made significant strides to create lasting change, its goal is to pursue continuous improvement. We look forward to continuing to work closely with Congress to enhance the Coast Guard as a service, and the Coast Guard Academy's climate as an inclusive learning and training environment.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to your questions.