

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE
U.S. MERCHANT MARINE ACADEMY BOARD OF VISITORS
(Held Virtually)
Sept. 16, 2020**

ATTENDEES.

BOARD OF VISITORS (BoV) MEMBERS: Representative Tom Suozzi (D-NY), Chairman; Sen. Roger Wicker (R-MS); Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS); Representative Peter King (R-NY); Representative Jack Bergman, (R-MI); VADM Johnny B. Wolfe, Jr., USN; VADM Scott Buschman, USCG (since meeting is virtual, RADM Richard Timme is standing by as a delegate should VADM Buschman have to leave the call); RADM Michael Wettlaufer; Ms. Jennifer Boykin; Mr. Stephan Carmel; Mr. Kevin Walsh; Lt.Col Robert "Scott" Volkert, USMC. Not in attendance: Representative Adam Smith (D-WA); Representative Max Rose (D-NY); Representative Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ) Dr. Henry Marcus

MARITIME ADMINISTRATION (MARAD) OFFICIALS: Mark H. Buzby, RADM, USN (Ret), Maritime Administrator; Mr. Cameron Humphrey, Director of Congressional Affairs, Maritime Administration.

USMMA STAFF and FACULTY OFFICIALS: Rear Admiral Joachim "Jack" Buono, USMS; Superintendent; Rear Admiral Susan Dunlap, USMS, Deputy Superintendent; Rear Admiral John Ballard, USMS, Academic Dean and Provost; CAPT Mikel Stroud, USMS, Commandant of Midshipmen; Mr. Kristofer Schnatz, Director of Physical Education and Athletics; Mr. George Rhyndance, Director of External and Congressional Affairs and Designated Federal Officer for the USMMA Board of Visitors.

PURPOSE:

As required by law, the BOV conducted the second of their required meetings for 2020, on Sept. 16, 2020. The meeting convened virtually, and was conducted via separate telephone and video links, a capability that proved to be sub-optimal in completing the meeting with high quality audio and video performance (post meeting feedback from the Congressional members of the BOV indicated Zoom was the much-

preferred platform for future virtual meetings). The meeting allowed for continued discourse on infrastructure, as well as status updates on the State of the Academy, the Long-Range Planning Strategy, and the status of the Strategic Plan priorities.

ADMINISTRATIVE WELCOME: The meeting was opened by Mr. Rhynedance, the administrative host for the call, and the Designated Federal Officer for the Board of Visitors. Subsequent to administrative announcements concerning the rules of the call, Rhynedance turned the meeting over to Representative Thomas Suozzi, Board Chairman, who then officially convened the meeting.

CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS: Rep. Suozzi called the meeting to order and opened by welcoming Board members and attendees. He promised an efficient meeting and commented on the state of the times saying this is a pretty dramatic time in our history (referring to the global health emergency). He asked why we were not using the Zoom conferencing platform for the call. He complimented the Academy, calling it a national treasure and saying how hard the Board is working to make sure people realize as much. He outlined his three main focus areas for the meeting:

- A brief review of the COVID environment and the challenges to USMMA including the Merchant Marine Academy's response, and the job they did returning the midshipmen Class of 2020 to campus for license examinations and graduation, ultimately sending them out of the Academy COVID-free. Next he described the semi-virtual graduation ceremony where the midshipmen actually graduated as a class. He discussed the effort to welcome the new class (Class of 2024) to the Academy, accomplishing their initial training efficiently and on time under COVID constraints. He referred to the effort in the aggregate as a remarkable accomplishment.
- Infrastructure improvement at the Academy. Chairman Suozzi indicated the entire Board needs to be focused on improving Academy infrastructure. He indicated RADM Buono would likely be talking about that as well as the COVID response in his remarks. He mentioned the ongoing study by the National Academy of Public Administration, and the USMMA Long Range Planning Strategy. He also mentioned the six strategic priorities and his desire for an update on that progress.

- Improve diversity recruiting. Chairman Suozzi next indicated he was very interested in the need to increase diversity at the Merchant Marine Academy. He indicated that he would like the Board of Visitors to re-double their efforts to identify and nominate qualified minority candidates. He indicated he was in the process of asking members of Congress to do the same, particularly the Congressional Black Caucus. Rep. Suozzi commented that it is important that the Academy looks like the people of the United States of America.

Chairman Suozzi closed his opening comments by calling USMMA a “fantastic institution” and saying it is a great honor to serve as Chairman of the BoV and be involved with that greatness. He indicated there have been challenges in the past related to issues of sexual harassment and accreditation, but complimented Admirals Buzby (Maritime Administrator) and Buono (USMMA Superintendent) for setting the Academy on a trajectory to greatness.

He then recognized Rep. Peter King. Chairman Suozzi indicated the retiring King is a great friend and a fantastic member of Congress, that he has known for decades. He complimented his record of devotion to the Academy over the years he served in Congress, and he thanked him for his great service. Rep. King, joining by phone, acknowledged the remarks, and Chairman Suozzi asked RADM Buono to make a presentation.

RADM Buono deferred to RADM Buzby, who on behalf of the Maritime Administration and the Department of Transportation said:

“Thank you Admiral (Buono) and thank you Chairman (Suozzi), I too want to thank Congressman King for the investment he has made in our Academy. You were here when I first got here on station about three and a half years ago. You were leading in a very challenging time in the Academy's history. The infrastructure was falling apart and you really helped, I think, focus a lot of the correct questioning and accountability that was really required to force improvements or force difficult questions to be answered. I can't thank you enough for assuming that leadership role in asking those tough questions that needed to be asked. We are a much better institution for it. I will mention I have a certificate of appreciation coming to you for that. We will likely have some other things as well coming soon. Publicly: Thank your sir for your dedication to our great institution.”

Rep. King: Thanked the group and wished the BoV and the Academy leadership well, saying also that the Academy is in a better position than ever before. He complimented it as an outstanding institution governed by outstanding leadership.

Chairman Suozzi next asked for opening remarks from the members of the Board.

Sen. Wicker: Indicated he was glad to be on the call. Sen. Wicker offered support for the diversity and inclusion focus Chairman Suozzi mentioned in his opening remarks, indicating he was committed to following the chairman's leadership in this area. Sen. Wicker also indicated strong support for continuing improvements and modernization to the aging infrastructure of the Academy. He congratulated RADM Buzby for his leadership.

Sen Moran: Indicated his support of the ongoing efforts at the Academy.

Rep. Bergman: Pointed out the need for continuing marketing efforts to tell the USMMA story, especially in the area of minority recruiting which will contribute to the quality that the country expects from the Academy. He renewed his offer to coordinate a Congressional baseball game to open Raymond J. Bartoszek '86 Field at The Dean White '45 WWII Merchant Marine Officer Complex, the recent overhaul of the baseball field complex at USMMA.

RADM Wettlaufer: Spoke to the mission of Military Sealift Command and their commitment to training USMMA midshipmen during their sea year excursions. He described the MSC workforce as extremely diverse and the largest employer of mariners in the country. He also described a diverse "ecosystem" of ships of all varieties. He described MSC as an opportunity for graduating mariners and hopes to hire about 25 percent of the next graduating class from USMMA.

VADM Buschman: This is VADM Buschman's first meeting on the Board as a new ex officio member. He indicated he was interested in the diversity issue and was happy to report that 29 members of the last two classes from USMMA had come to the U.S. Coast Guard.

Ms. Boykin: Honored to represent the industry, as well as the alumni. Indicated her familiarity from a firsthand perspective of the benefits the Academy provides to future leaders. Strongly believes the more diverse the Academy classes are, the greater opportunity they have to prepare for leadership no matter where they go.

VADM Wolfe: Thanked RADM Buzby for his leadership. Commented on the intense competition for positions at the school and for active military service. Added that no one should ever ask the question whether there is a need for this Academy and what it provides – world class leaders in every area of the maritime mission. Indicated a strong desire to discuss the NAPA study at greater length.

Lt. Col. Volkert: Commented on recent higher education report classifying USMMA as the 26th best undergraduate engineering program in the best 360 colleges in America.

Mr. Carmel: Commented on the investment in Sea Year by his company with 100-125 cadets on Maersk ships. Indicated an interest in the internship program and commented that a lot of work was being done remotely. Mr. Carmel commented that there is a lot of change during the current situation (global health emergency), but that collectively, it will get figured out.

Mr. Walsh: Thanked the DOT and MARAD staff for setting up the meeting. Acknowledged the difficulty of conducting a meeting of this sort in this restricted environment. Commented that infrastructure is his priority. Indicated that anybody that has been on campus knows the infrastructure is dated and is in dire need of repair and improvement, or replacement. Reinforced his commitment to renewing the Academy infrastructure.

Chairman Suozzi asked RADM Buzby for an opening statement to the Board.

RADM Buzby: Thanked the group for their continued commitment to the Academy. He acknowledged Rep. King's ongoing commitment and support to the Academy as he retires from Congress and the Board. He closed by thanking the members of the Board for their commitment to the Academy.

Chairman Suozzi: Called for the approval of the draft minutes from the Feb. 3, 2020 Board meeting. Hearing no objection, the minutes were approved by unanimous vote. Following the vote, Chairman Suozzi asked RADM Buono for opening comments and to set the stage for the Board since the last meeting.

RADM Buono: The USMMA Superintendent described the conditions at the Academy starting in mid-February 2020 (just following the previous BOV meeting), when the decision was made not to return the midshipmen to USMMA from spring break. He described the inability to adequately house COVID positive students on campus, and the local health facility's inability to take students that were identified as COVID-positive as the primary reasons for the decision to keep the midshipmen from returning in Feb.

He described the Return of Midshipmen Plan as a 150-page, 24-chapter document that included the pivot to distance learning and the focus on the Academy leadership of getting the Class of 2020 back to the Academy, in a COVID-free environment, for license examinations and graduation. He described the unique requirements for, and order of licensing examinations, graduation and commissioning for USMMA midshipmen. He also reported success at bringing the senior class back at the beginning of June, isolating them for two weeks before embarking on exams followed by an unattended near-virtual graduation ceremony. That effort was followed by the return of the remainder of the regiment as well as the successful welcoming and integration of the Class of 2024.

As the summer transitioned to the new academic year, RADM Buono indicated 50 percent of the Academy faculty was on-site and teaching. He also emphasized the in-person, hands-on requirements of the curriculum were not hampered significantly by the global health emergency.

RADM Buono concluded his remarks by describing one key recent moment was when the regiment of midshipmen voted, by a strong majority, to remain locked down on campus, to forego any kind of off-campus liberty, and to attempt to mitigate any potential spread of the virus by staying "in a bubble" at Kings Point. At the time of the BOV meeting this effort had been largely successful with the regiment enjoying a relatively COVID-free environment. This has enabled USMMA to continue with its mission of graduating leaders of exemplary character committed to serving the Nation.

Chairman Suozzi: Thanked RADM Buono for the update and described the foundational structure of the meeting as being based on the six Academy strategic priorities:

1. Education
2. Institutional Culture
3. Infrastructure
4. Governance, Leadership and Administration
5. Communications and relationships
6. Athletics

Chairman Suozzi indicated the Board would skip the Institutional Culture priority in the order of the strategic priorities and come back to it later, as diversity recruitment was an important topic for the meeting and he felt a more robust discussion of this issue was warranted. He then turned it over to RDML Ballard for an update on Strategic Priority #1 – Education.

EDUCATION

RDML Ballard: From the very beginning of the global health emergency USMMA wanted to graduate the class of 2020 on campus and on time. Academy faculty had to evaluate the curriculum based on what could be taught by distance, and what needed to be modified partially, or what we had to shift and re-schedule to keep the students progressing. RDML Ballard stated this was new. Most of the faculty and the students were unfamiliar with distance learning and the challenges that come with it. He mentioned student challenges that included such basic items as having adequate Wi-Fi at home to take classes and modifying the family dynamic that necessarily changes with the addition of a college student attending classes from the home. The Academic departments, assisted by the Commandant's office, had to mail books and computers all around the country to keep students synchronized with the curriculum. He indicated they were able to work through most every issue and complete the academic year on-time. Feedback from students has been largely positive. No one likes distance learning as much as they like face-to-face, and face-to-face meant social distancing and wearing masks in class. RDML Ballard indicated they have even taken advantage of the summer and fall weather to conduct classes outside. He described on-going discussion about the end of trimester break and the end of year holiday period and some of the discussions about how that might take shape while still protecting the students. He indicated mid-term results in the first trimester of this year were about the same as they have been and that since the return of the

regiment, they have been working to include midshipmen ideas about distance and modified learning into actual class time adjustments.

Chairman Suozzi: Thanked RDML Ballard and commented on the complexity of the adjustments the Dean and his staff had made to the student learning experience, calling it remarkable. He then indicated they would skip Strategic Priority #2, Institutional Culture, until later in the meeting and invited RADM Buono to discuss Strategic Priority #3, Infrastructure.

RADM Buono: Deferred his comments on infrastructure in order to add an item to his opening remarks. He indicated he neglected to discuss the importance of the emotional health and safety of the midshipmen while at the Academy in the COVID environment. RADM Buono described a number of initiatives that have been undertaken in support of that emotional health and safety, specifically mentioning the quality of life support provided by the USMMA Alumni Association and Foundation and National Parents Association on behalf of the midshipmen.

INFRASTRUCTURE

RADM Buono then offered a short update on the USMMA master plan. He indicated the master plan was at DOT and OMB for review and approval, and it was not yet ready for distribution and further discussion, but he indicated he was heartened by the plan, calling it, "a very exciting story." He offered to the Board the leadership role undertaken by RDML Dunlap in developing and submitting the plan, while coordinating it with outside agencies like the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and their subcontractors. RADM Buono indicated he was aware of the Board's keen interest in the plan and he committed to providing it when it is approved for more formal release.

GOVERNANCE

RDML Dunlap updated the status of the Governance, Leadership and Administration strategic priority to include the progress of the strategic priority working group. She included a robust discussion that described the level of staffing in the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response office (100%), as well as the USMMA optimism for the new Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Officer. She reported the recent completion and posting of the 2018-2019 Academic Program year Annual Report on Sexual Assault at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (Sept. 2, 2020).

NOTE: The USMMA Board of Visitors received a timely submitted letter from Mr. Thomas Grasso (public) concerning SASH at USMMA. The letter was shared with the BoV prior to the meeting. RDML Dunlap indicated she had reviewed the letter and was prepared to discuss if required. Chairman Suozzi indicated the Board would review at a later date.

[Post meeting Update: Mr. Grasso's letter describes his strong recommendation that the topic of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment be included in every meeting of the BoV, as well as complimenting the Academy on their recent progress in changing the culture. His letter is included at the end of these minutes.]

Chairman Suozzi: Next asked for an update on Strategic Priority #5, Communications and Relationships from Mr. Rhyndance.

COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Mr. Rhyndance: Indicated that the COVID environment challenged communications efforts at the Academy in many ways since the last Board meeting, but that outreach efforts continued to be strong to the many stakeholders and constituents of the Academy. He indicated the messaging priority during the global health crisis has been on the safety, health and well-being of the midshipmen, faculty, and staff and that RADM Buono has committed to over-communicating during the crisis rather under-communicating. He described the various communication methods used during the crisis, including Social Media, but pointed out that video messaging has been the best method of sharing information. Mr. Rhyndance shared the continued success of the Academy Social Media presence and offered metrics that included a 30% increase in followers on Social Media in the five months since the last Board meeting. Additionally, the Academy saw another 30% increase during the training period for the new Class of 2024, which was highlighted by the posting of over 12,000 photos and 190 stories about the new class. He closed by indicating that continued communication across the spectrum of constituents is extremely important, especially in the global pandemic environment, and the Academy communications team is committed to continuing to tell the Academy story.

Chairman Suozzi: Offered that the Board is aware that communications is doing a world-class job of getting the word out. He then called on Mr. Schnatz to update Strategic Priority #6.

ATHLETICS

Mr. Schnatz: Shared that USMMA is very close to the completion of the Raymond J. Bartoszek '86 Field at The Dean White '45 WWII Merchant Marine Officer Complex at the former Lower Roosevelt Field. The outfield fencing will go up next and they are looking forward to opening this tremendous new athletic complex. Mr. Schnatz then described recent work in the athletic department to develop a diversity and inclusion committee. "We encourage honest dialogue in a safe environment that we believe will promote positive change." The athletic teams are committed to making the meetings a priority every month. The department wants to continue the conversation which will create a positive environment for change.

Chairman Suozzi concluded the briefings of the Strategic Priorities by asking for questions from the Board. Specifically, he asked if there were any questions about educational programs, infrastructure or sexual harassment issues.

Following a brief discussion about the NAPA study and the challenges of completing the study during the global health emergency, the Chairman asked one more time if there were any further questions concerning the strategic priorities. Hearing no further questions, he then closed the discussion on strategic priorities and moved on to the issue of diversity at the Academy.

Chairman Suozzi: Offered that the USMMA experience brings the opportunity to get an Ivy League education as well as trade skills. As he mentioned in his opening statement, he is concerned about diversity at the Academy and described his commitment to getting other members of Congress to support an increase in nominating African-American candidates. He stated that if half of the 435 members of Congress could commit to try and recruit two African-American candidates that are qualified to attend USMMA, and half the senators could do the same, there would be a significant increase in the number of African-Americans attending the Academy. He asked USMMA to prepare a fact sheet he could share with other members of Congress and he asked that the Academy staff and the USMMA Alumni Association and Foundation make themselves available to speak to members of Congress about the Academy experience. Chairman Suozzi then asked the Board to work as a team to add diversity to "this fantastic institution and provide a great opportunity for service and for a

great career.” He charged the Board members and their staffs work with Admissions to determine how best to move ahead.

Chairman Suozzi then asked Acting Director of Admissions, CDR Keith Watson to discuss Admission as it applies to diverse candidates.

CDR Watson acknowledged that diversity admissions and recruiting are a difficult issue and one they struggle with. He indicated that test scores are really not an indicator or predictor of success during the leader development experience at the Academy. For the current recruiting year, we were off to a good start, but COVID and the global pandemic really affected our women and minority candidate pool in terms of actually getting the candidates into the Academy. CDR Watson indicated that COVID seemed to scare some candidates to go a different direction. Watson indicated the preliminary work that Rep. Suozzi mentioned has had an impact as he had recently received correspondence from six or seven Members of Congress, all very excited and committed to assisting. CDR Watson next gave a brief review of the current state of diversity recruiting for the Class of 2025. He indicated they had 636 applications on file, with 206 being minority candidates. Of those 206, only 30 are African-American. “I think we can all agree that isn’t where we want to be, so we are working to move forward on that.” CDR Watson described a number of initiatives to help get information to minority candidates.

Chairman Suozzi asked how many applications does USMMA receive in the aggregate. CDR Watson indicated the number is around 1750, and that the Admissions Department was hard at work hiring an additional admissions representative specifically charged with minority recruiting efforts. CDR Watson also suggested a broader use of athletics in recruiting minority candidates could positively impact overall minority efforts.

Chairman Suozzi recognized Coach Rob Pryor, Head Basketball Coach and diversity Officer in the Athletic Department in response to the comments about athletics and minority recruiting. Coach Pryor described his experience in recruiting minority candidates and pointed out that in addition to consistently communicating with potential recruits, we must focus on families. “At the end of the day we are not only recruiting the young man or the young lady but you are also recruiting the family as well.”

Chairman Suozzi next recognized Milton Urban, USMMA Class of 1971, as a special guest to share information about minority attendance and recruiting at USMMA. Mr. Urban has served on a number of committees on minority recruiting for Historically Black Colleges and Universities. He offered that communication with the appropriate groups of recruits and stakeholders is extremely important. Chairman Suozzi indicated he had engaged the Congressional Black Caucus for assistance. Urban concurred it is an important outreach effort that will result in progress. Chairman Suozzi asked Mr. Urban to stay in touch and thanked him for staying with the call.

Chairman recognized discussion from the Board:

Jennifer Boykin – Completely agree with earlier outreach to potential recruits - around the 9th or 10th grade level. There are best recruiting practices out there from other universities that we might avail ourselves of especially as it applies to STEM education, women and minorities.

Chairman Suozzi offered that high school recruiting for diversity students is difficult. It is made harder by the poor infrastructure at the Academy. Visitors see the general disrepair and it affects them. He indicated West Point has made some significant improvements in modernization and it is his understanding that it has had a positive impact on their recruiting. Beyond the issue of recruiting women and minorities, Chairman Suozzi indicated we want to recruit all interested students. We want everyone in the U.S. to know what a fantastic facility and program we have.

Chairman Suozzi next asked for closing remarks from the Board before opening up for public comment.

Each Board member present made brief, complimentary closing comments.

Chairman Suozzi opened the floor to public comments. There were none. [NOTE: USMMA was informed after the meeting that the communications system did not allow the public to connect and comment. Communications system provided for the meeting was suboptimal. Strongly recommend Zoom or other platform for next meeting that contains a virtual component.]

Chairman Suozzi offered closing remarks. Thanked all participants for their “incredibly professional” presentations. He complimented the Academy on

the work they have accomplished during the pandemic. He indicated his desire to continue to work on the historic issues of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment as well as accreditation. He indicated his strong desire to improve and modernize the USMMA infrastructure and he challenged the Superintendent to take advantage of the Congressional members on the Board to assist with those efforts. He asked the Superintendent, CDR Watson, Coach Pryor, the Commandant of Midshipmen, and the Alumni Association to call a meeting (that Chairman Suozzi would attend) to share progress on diversity recruiting.

Prior to closing the meeting Chairman Suozzi recognized Maritime Administrator Mark Buzby for closing comments:

RADM Buzby thanked Chairman Suozzi and appreciated the leadership he has brought to the Board over the last two years. He indicated it is making a difference and that the meetings of the Board were much different than what he has seen in years before. Participation and interest have increased, and members of the BoV have a real sense of becoming involved in making the Academy a better place. He closed by saying, "I'm excited about where we are going and I think together we will make significant positive improvements over the coming year."

Chairman Suozzi officially adjourned the meeting.

Prepared by:
George Rhynedance
Designated Federal Officer to the USMMA Board of Visitors

Letter submitted by Mr. Thomas Grasso to the USMMA Board of Visitors in accordance with the procedures outlined in the Federal Register Meeting Notice for the USMMA Board of Visitors meeting in September 2020.

LAW OFFICES OF
THOMAS M GRASSO LLC

8 Willow Street, Cranford, New Jersey 07016-1855

T: (908) 514-8850

E: tom@tmgrassolaw.com

September 14, 2020

BY EMAIL TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE
U.S. MERCHANT MARINE ACADEMY BOARD OF VISITORS

BY EMAIL: RhynedanceG@USMMA.EDU

George H. Rhynedance

Director

External and Congressional Affairs

Designated Federal Officer

Office of the Superintendent

U.S. Merchant Marine Academy

Kings Point, NY 11024

Written Statement Submitted for Consideration by the
U.S. Merchant Marine Academy Board of Visitors
at its meeting scheduled for
Wednesday, September 16, 2020

Re: Sexual Assault / Sexual Harassment

Dear Honorable Board of Visitors Members:

I am a 1991 graduate of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. I have been practicing Admiralty law for 23 years in private practice. Before that, I sailed as Third Officer with the Military Sealift Command and raised my license to Second Mate / Limited Master. I write to bring to this Board's attention a gross oversight in the meeting Agenda (Notice of Public Meeting, Doc. 2020-19013, 85 FR 53435, pp. 53435-53436)—the lack of any report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment.

In recent years, I have represented several Academy midshipmen for various reasons including victims of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment (SASH). I represent a former Class of 2020 plebe midshipmen who was the victim of sexual assault by his soccer teammates. The DOT Inspector General issued a report that confirmed not only his account of the events, but also revealed a culture of hazing and misconduct within the team with "multiple victims." Indeed, "[p]lebes were told that the assaults were a 'tradition' and that it happened to most Plebes." IG Investigation Report No. I17Z0020200 dated August 24, 2018). This victim was the subject of my prior writings to this Board in April 2018 and May 2019 which should be part of the official minutes and records of this Board.

The Academy's SASH record is poor and well documented. The U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of Inspector General's website contains several reports of its audits, including the most recent Report No. ST2018039 March 28, 2018,

<https://www.oig.dot.gov/sites/default/files/USMMA%20SAPR%20Final%20Report.pdf> mandated by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 (NDAA), which identified gaps in the system.

SASH training and prevention is critical to establishing mutual respect among students, faculty and staff, and to affirming each person's personal dignity. There is simply no place in campus or professional life for harassing or abusing behavior. These principles must be taught, implemented, and reviewed on a continuing basis. Students must feel safe to report incidents without fear of retribution or ostracization by fellow midshipmen or administration.

Academy students are unique in that they spend 300 days upon commercial and/or Military Sealift Command ships learning their trade first-hand. While this is an opportunity unmatched in college education, it also brings unique risks. Midshipmen who sail out as cadets must have confidence in the reporting system and know that administration will take complaints seriously and act upon them. Sadly, there are numerous stories emerging from former cadets, male and female, who fell victim to sexual assault and harassment.

Moreover, COVID-19 has only complicated the risks facing midshipmen heading out to sea as cadets. As recently reported in Maritime Executive <https://www.maritime-executive.com/editorials/covid-19-and-the-straining-u-s-merchant-marine>, the mental health of mariners is under great strain. Many mariners have been unable to rotate off ships for relief. Academy cadets, many for the first time, will be introduced to this environment and the stress that may already be manifested on the ship. The Academy's Department of Shipboard Training must be especially aware of the risks and have in place a process to quickly and effectively keep the cadets safe, and properly record reports so that further action may be taken with the shipping company, the U.S. Coast Guard, and law enforcement as may be necessary.

The Academy, and the Board, must remain vigilant and follow through on these concepts. COVID-19 should not be the "mid-watch," which may lull some into complacency and failure to keep a proper lookout. With these concerns in mind, I strongly recommend that SASH be included on the agenda to be discussed at the coming meeting, and that it be a regular agenda item of every meeting going forward. The Board should inquire into the following:

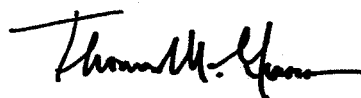
1. What is the Academy's current SASH policy?
2. What are the number and type of incidents for 2019 and 2020?
3. How many incidents on campus and at sea?
4. What is the procedure to report on campus and at sea? How is the report handled?
5. What is the Department of Shipboard Training's policy regarding report intake and disposition?
6. What is the disposition of the incident claims made?
7. What is the role of the U.S. Coast Guard in investigating SASH incidents?
8. How many at-sea incidents has the Academy referred to the U.S. Coast Guard for investigation?
9. If an incident occurs at sea, what does the Academy do to inform the company and to protect cadets from sailing aboard ships with a claim history or reputation?
10. What are the midshipmen's views toward SASH – do they feel confident in the system?
11. Are there any objective markers that indicate culture change on campus?

Lastly, SASH developments should be a regular topic of discussion because the Board should also be aware of the good developments. To that end, I wish to commend the efforts of Academy Superintendent, RADM Jack Buono, to change the Academy culture. On several occasions, Admiral Buono has demanded that the midshipmen stand up for each other and not merely be passive bystanders to abuse. He calls on his midshipmen with the watchwords of "respect, honor, and service" to stand up to protect each other's personal dignity. He has called upon them to prepare themselves to be leaders in isolated environments. The midshipmen are indeed "shipmates" who owe a sacred duty to each other. Admiral Buono's efforts in bringing light to these issues and addressing these challenges to make systemic change should be recognized and encouraged.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this extremely important issue. I am available to address any questions any Board Members may have.

Very respectfully submitted,

By:



Thomas M. Grasso, Esq.

TMG/

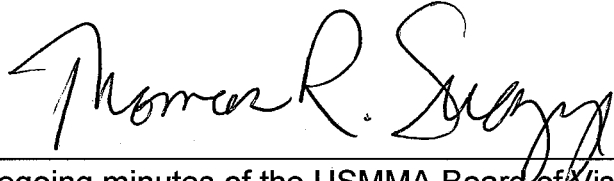
cc:

Sen. Roger Wicker (MS), ex officio
Sen. Jerry Moran (KS)
Rep. Adam Smith (WA-09), ex officio
Rep. Max Rose (NY-11)
Rep. Mikie Sherrill (NJ-11)
Rep. Jack Bergman (MI-01)
Rep. Peter King (NY-02)
Rep. Tom Suozzi (NY-03)
Ms. Jennifer Boykin (USMMA Graduate)
Mr. Kevin Walsh (USMMA Graduate)
Mr. Stephen Carmel (Maritime Industry Representative)
Vice Admiral Johnny R. Wolfe, Jr. (USN Flag Officer)
Lieutenant Colonel Robert Scott Volkert, (USMC Flag Officer)
Rear Admiral Michael Wettlaufer, USN, Commander Military Sealift Command, ex officio
Vice Admiral Daniel B. Abel, USCG, Deputy Commander for Operations, ex officio
Dr. Henry S. Marcus, DBA, Chairman, USMMA Advisory Board, ex officio

Ilene Kreitzer, Esq., Academy Counsel

USMMA Board of Visitors

Chairman's certification of, and direction to post, the minutes of the USMMA Board of Visitors meeting held virtually on Sept. 16, 2020.



_____ I hereby certify that, the foregoing minutes of the USMMA Board of Visitors are accurate and complete. They will be archived on the USMMA Board of Visitors website.

Representative Thomas Suozzi, Chairman, USMMA Board of Visitors

Date: *5/13/2022*