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27 Nov 2023

**Subject:** Increases in Sexual Assault and Harassment in the Military Services

**Request:** Follow up with the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Homeland Security on previous DACOWITS recommendations from 2015 and 2018 regarding sexual assault and harassment. Conduct independent research regarding ongoing sexual assault and harassment trends at both military academies and within the services. Analyze findings and actions regarding OSD's Independent Review Commission; provide specific policy and possible legislative recommendations. Consider also discussing the findings with the Maritime Administration and the Secretary of Transportation (regarding the Merchant Marine Academy).

**Background:** It has been a little over five years since #MeToo became mainstream where assault and harassment in the workplace was openly discussed. The recent changes to the Uniform Code of Military Justice and related service instructions strengthened the visibility and accountability for violations. DACOWITS had forceful recommendations on the topic in 2015 and its first recommendation in 2018 asked for "The Secretary of Defense should conduct a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of the Military Services' policies, standards, training, and enforcement to eliminate gender discrimination and sexual harassment."

Unfortunately, there still appears to be places where longstanding culture of not properly providing safe and harassment-free workplaces exist. An April 2023 report by the Department of Defense says that "an estimated 21.4 percent of academy women and 4.4 percent of academy men experienced unwanted sexual contact... this is an *increase* compared to the 2018 rate. Rates of sexual harassment also *increased*."<sup>1</sup> A Second Lieutenant in the Air Force committed suicide in 2021 following a rape as a cadet at the Air Force Academy; her suicide note tragically read: "Do all that you can to make sure I am the last one."<sup>2</sup> Also, a large investigation (Operation Fouled Anchor) by the Coast Guard regarding decades of misconduct at their Academy went unreported to Congress including some 90 potential assaults from the late 1980s to 2006. "There was a disturbing pattern of not treating reported sexual assaults

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.sapr.mil/sites/default/files/public/docs/reports/MSA/DOD Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at MSAs APY21-22.pdf](https://www.sapr.mil/sites/default/files/public/docs/reports/MSA/DOD%20Annual%20Report%20on%20Sexual%20Harassment%20and%20Violence%20at%20MSAs%20APY21-22.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fox21news.com/top-stories/cadets-haunting-suicide-note-prompts-parents-to-file-wrongful-death-claims-against-air-force-academy/>

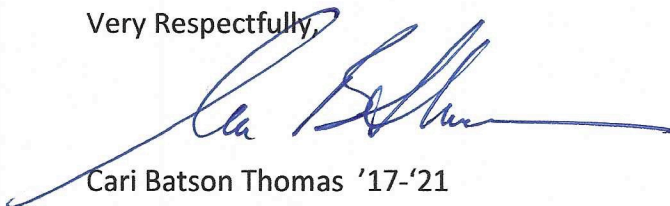
as criminal matters,” the Coast Guard’s draft report reviewed by CNN stated.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, a senior professor at the Coast Guard Academy had his post-Coast Guard employment recommendation rescinded after allegations of abuse and retaliation by both cadets and other officers surfaced and was investigated with minimal accountability.<sup>4</sup> At the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, some two dozen midshipmen reported having been assaulted between 2019 and 2022, felt that sexual misconduct was widespread and feared retaliation if they came forward with their reports.<sup>5</sup>

There is work being done by the services. According to a Defense Roundtable in March 2023, Secretary Austin launched an Independent Review Commission and approved several recommendations.<sup>6</sup> The Commandant of the Coast Guard also launched an Accountability and Transparency Review, whose results currently pend release.<sup>7</sup> The undated Maritime Administration developed a document which outlined a plan to reduce both sexual assaults and harassment.<sup>8</sup>

**Summary:** The 2022 DoD “report shows a significant increase in sexual assault prevalence at the military service academies. Our numbers indicate that this is the highest sexual assault estimated prevalence rate for both women and men at the military service academies since the department started measuring this in 2006”<sup>9</sup> is sufficient for DACOWITS to again consider an independent review of the topic of sexual assault and harassment. I recommend you specifically focus on the military academies first (including the Merchant Marine Academy where most graduates end up in the Navy Reserve), and then in future years examine service-wide trends.

Please call or email with any questions or desire to follow up. While I will be unable to be with you during your quarterly meeting as my business as the CEO of the Coast Guard’s military aid society will require me to be meeting with servicemembers in Guam, I would happily connect with you electronically as needed and/or as technologically possible.

Very Respectfully,



Cari Batson Thomas '17-'21

*Your work is so important -  
Thanks for your attention to this  
Very important topic!*

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/30/politics/coast-guard-academy-secret-sexual-assault-investigation-invs/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/03/politics/coast-guard-sulmasy-resign/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/08/us/us-merchant-marine-academy-sexual-assault-report-invs/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3326233/annual-report-on-sexual-harassment-and-violence-at-the-military-service-academi/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.mycg.uscg.mil/News/Article/3490710/accountability-and-transparency-review-to-ensure-a-culture-where-everyone-is-sa/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.maritime.dot.gov/sites/marad.dot.gov/files/docs/resources/3901/usmerchantmarineacademy.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3326233/annual-report-on-sexual-harassment-and-violence-at-the-military-service-academi/>