

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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### Opening Statement Chairman Jamie Raskin (MD-08)

#### Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

#### Hearing on “Righting the Ship: The Coast Guard Must Improve its Processes for Addressing Harassment, Bullying, and Retaliation”

December 11, 2019

Welcome to today’s joint hearing with the Committee on Oversight and Reform’s Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties and the Committee on Homeland Security’s Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security. Today, we will be receiving the results of an 18-month-long staff investigation examining how the Coast Guard handles allegations of harassment, bullying, and retaliation.

This investigation was spearheaded by Chairman Bennie Thompson, who leads the Committee on Homeland Security, and by our own late Chairman Elijah Cummings, in close consultation with Rep. Courtney.

Chairman Cummings served as the Chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee’s Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation for four years. He was deeply troubled by the results of a 2017 report finding inequitable outcomes for minority cadets, including lower graduation rates and higher levels of discipline.

Elijah was also disturbed by the Inspector General’s finding that a member of the military assigned to the Coast Guard Academy faculty suffered retaliation for reporting harassment and bullying, and he wanted to know what was being done to address the retaliation and to ensure that allegations were handled properly.

**The findings of the Committees’ joint investigation are clear: Coast Guard military leadership has failed to promptly, thoroughly, and impartially address harassment, bullying, and retaliation allegations at the Academy. Furthermore, Coast Guard leadership has refused to hold anyone accountable for these failures.**

Lieutenant Commander Kimberly Young-McLear, who will testify today, is a faculty member at the Coast Guard Academy. She has served in the Coast Guard for sixteen years,

holds a Ph.D. in Systems Engineering, and is on the permanent faculty at the Academy. She is among the very best our nation has to offer.

In 2016, Lieutenant Commander Young-McLear alleged she was suffering harassment and bullying. Her allegations were handled through the Coast Guard's anti-harassment process.

However, rather than promptly and impartially determining whether her allegations were true, the Coast Guard swept her allegations under the rug.

A senior officer then communicated to Lieutenant Commander Young-McLear that her allegations had been investigated three times, and that each time, the allegations were not substantiated. That was not accurate. The Coast Guard had not investigated any of her allegations fully. But the Coast Guard spread this misinformation far and wide, sowing doubt among Lieutenant Commander Young-McLear's colleagues about the legitimacy of her complaints, further isolating her from her peers.

Nevertheless, she persisted and took her allegations to the Office of the Deputy Commandant for Mission Support. The Coast Guard finally conducted an investigation that verified her complaint of bullying and found that she had suffered work interference and her performance had been undermined. And yet, senior Coast Guard officials inexplicably concluded that her allegations were unsubstantiated.

Finally, to add injury to insult, Lieutenant Commander Young-McLear was retaliated against for making allegations of harassment and bullying.

Anti-harassment and anti-bullying processes can be effective only if complainants can trust that their complaints will be handled properly. The many failures identified by our investigation send a clear signal to Coast Guard personnel that coming forward with allegations of harassment or bullying is pointless and even potentially damaging. I also want to note that our staff reached out to the manager who allegedly harassed and bullied the Lieutenant Commander, but he refused to speak with the Committees.

I would like to thank Lieutenant Commander Young-McLear for her service to our nation and her bravery in speaking out and being here today. I also thank the Office of the Inspector General for their work on this issue.

Unfortunately, despite our repeated requests for his testimony, the Commandant of the Coast Guard, Admiral Karl Schultz, refused to attend this hearing or account for whether the Coast Guard will act to ensure no other Coast Guard member suffers as Lieutenant Commander Young-McLear has.

According to the Coast Guard's Civil Rights Manual, "Command leadership is ultimately responsible for the Coast Guard's civil rights outcomes." The Commandant is the ultimate leader of the Coast Guard. His refusal to appear today casts doubt on how seriously the Coast Guard is taking the disturbing findings of the Inspector General and this Committee. But rest

assured—we take it very seriously, and we will insist on systematic changes to address the numerous deficiencies we have identified.

