

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Ron Johnson**  
**“Coast Guard Academy Whistleblowers: Stories of Sexual Assault and Harassment”**  
**Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations**  
**December 12, 2023**

Over the last two months, the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (the Subcommittee) conducted a bipartisan review of sexual assaults and harassment at the Coast Guard Academy. The Subcommittee spoke with, and reviewed accounts from, individuals—both current and former cadets—who shared first-hand accounts of the sexual violence and mistreatment they faced during their time at the academy. Most of these stories had very unfortunate similarities—Coast Guard Academy officials failed to provide these victims the support they needed following their assault and did little to hold alleged perpetrators accountable.

These stories corroborate press reports from earlier this year that documented persistent leadership problems at the Coast Guard Academy regarding its handling of alleged sexual assaults. Beginning in June 2023, CNN published a series of articles featuring instances of sexual assault and sexual harassment that occurred at the academy with hardly any sufficient action taken by academy officials.

Most notably, CNN revealed that in 2014 the Coast Guard initiated its own investigation into alleged sexual abuse at the school. That investigation, called Operation Fouled Anchor, uncovered more than 100 potential assaults occurring between 1990 and 2006. CNN reported that Operation Fouled Anchor, “identified more than 60 substantiated incidents of rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment committed by academy cadets.”<sup>1</sup> CNN also noted that the investigation “found that school leaders routinely failed to report serious allegations to law enforcement, intentionally avoiding the criminal justice system.”<sup>2</sup> When school officials recommended pursuing criminal inquiries into alleged assaults, leadership at the academy apparently stopped those efforts.

The findings of Operation Fouled Anchor were so damning that, after the final report was completed in 2020, Coast Guard officials apparently kept it hidden from the public for three years. Prompted by inquiries from CNN about the investigation, in late June 2023 the Coast Guard finally briefed the Senate Commerce Committee on Operation Fouled Anchor, just days before CNN publicly revealed its existence and subsequent cover-up.

The Coast Guard must be held accountable for any action officials may have taken that led to the cover-up of the findings of Operation Fouled Anchor. Further, to the extent that Coast Guard Academy leadership mishandled or downplayed allegations of sexual assault at the school, that failure cannot be allowed to go unpunished. Finally, academy cadets and all

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<sup>1</sup> Blake Ellis et al., Criminal investigation into Coast Guard Academy revealed years of sexual assault cover-ups, but findings were kept secret, CNN, June 30, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/30/politics/coast-guard-academy-secret-sexual-assault-investigation-invs/index.html>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

members of the Coast Guard deserve to feel safe among their fellow service members. No one should ever be in an environment that does not take sexual violence or harassment seriously.

I hope Coast Guard officials will listen to today's hearing, learn from the academy's failures, and make immediate and necessary changes to restore its credibility among past, current, and prospective service members. I thank the witnesses for coming forward today.