



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**Maritime  
Administration**

Office of the Chief Counsel

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

December 21, 2021

Ms. Sharon Block  
Official Performing the Delegated Duties of Administrator,  
Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs,  
Office of Management and Budget  
725 17th Street NW Washington, DC 20503

Dear Administrator Block:

The Maritime Administration requests emergency processing of a request for approval of a collection of information concerning the Maritime Administration (MARAD), U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA), and mariner cadet training aboard commercial vessels.

In September of 2021, a student at the USMMA published a disturbing account of sexual assault occurring while onboard a commercial vessel during her cadet at sea training. On October 2, 2021, the Deputy Secretary, Department of Transportation (DOT), issued a statement committing to “move swiftly and resolutely to address sexual assault and harassment, protect and support survivors, and fulfill our deep commitment to the vital work of the USMMA.” Shortly thereafter, to protect the safety of cadet mariners, the DOT, and MARAD, which is responsible for providing oversight of the USMMA and support to the nation’s State Maritime Academies, paused the use of commercial vessels in what is called Sea Year training for cadets. From that time until now, MARAD has been working to develop and establish the means to protect cadets’ personal safety and security in the course of their training onboard commercial vessels. As a result of these efforts, MARAD is now prepared to issue interim sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention measures to be agreed to and incorporated by commercial vessel operators before resuming cadet training on commercial vessels. The inability to safely utilize commercial vessels for mariner training is presently disrupting cadets’ ability to predict when and how they may obtain the necessary experience required to obtain their U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Marine Officer license while at the same time adversely impacting an industry that relies on the cadets as valued crew members. However, cadet safety being paramount, MARAD cannot resume training on commercial vessels until it solidifies an understanding with the vessel operators on how best to protect against sexual assault and harassment moving forward.

The USMMA and State Maritime Academies educate and train the next generation of leaders, and are committed to ensuring that all members of the U.S merchant marine learn and work in environments built upon respect, mutual support, accountability, and fairness, free from sexual harassment and sexual violence. To better provide for these important concerns, MARAD is

working to implement policies, programs, and practices that are aimed at preventing incidents of sexual violence and sexual harassment and when necessary, ensure an appropriate response to any violation.

On November 24, 2021, DOT and MARAD released a new report titled, *Organizational Assessment of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA): A Path Forward* and an accompanying Implementation Plan prepared by the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA). The NAPA assessment was directed by the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act to provide an analysis of the operations of the USMMA and offer modernization recommendations for implementation consideration. In remarking on the report, Acting Maritime Administrator Lucinda Lessley addressed the magnitude and urgency stating that cadets “deserve a modern, safe, and inclusive learning environment where they have the training and resources that will prepare them to succeed in the U.S. merchant marine and in our armed forces. We acknowledge, and have been working to address, the many urgent issues raised by NAPA’s report and to put USMMA on a path to modernization.” The NAPA assessment specifically identified sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention and response as a “systemic issue” further adding to MARAD’s imperative to act quickly and to decisively respond to this urgent safety need.

In alignment with the reports’ recommendation, MARAD remains committed to ensuring the safety, security, and well-being of cadets as an overarching mandate in providing the training and resources necessary to graduate licensed merchant marine officers who can meet the national security, economic, and transportation needs of our nation. The recommendations provided by NAPA stressed supporting a campus where cadets learn to become exemplary leaders in a safe, secure, and modern environment. Thus, MARAD is working to take corrective action and implement the NAPA recommendations without delay.

While MARAD will draft a follow-on information collection request to address all aspects of its plans to address and prevent sexual assault and harassment of cadets while training onboard commercial vessels, this interim collection of information specifically concerns vessel operator acceptance of MARAD safety and security tenets and compliance reporting and auditing requirements. In order to return cadets to their training on commercial vessels, which is critical in meeting our nation’s demands for licensed mariners, a timely collection will help mitigate disruption and afford cadets greater personal safety and security protections.

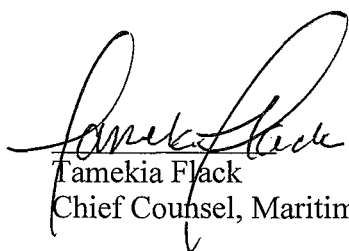
Under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 and its implementing regulations at 5 CFR 1320.13, Emergency Processing, MARAD is respectfully requesting emergency processing for a collection of information that is critical to its mission of ensuring the training of the next generation of merchant mariners and consistent with the Department’s pledge to act swiftly and resolutely. The collection is necessary for the agency to monitor and ensure the physical safety and security of cadets during their training onboard commercial vessels. MARAD cannot reasonably comply with the normal clearance procedures because the normal clearance procedures would further delay resumption of cadet training and perpetuate the disruption of cadets’ licensure progress as well as important maritime industry commercial interests. With the approval of our requested information collection, MARAD will be able to obtain reports, ensure compliance, and open lanes of communication with commercial vessel operators that are crucial to the process of ensuring cadet safety and security. For the reasons stated, MARAD cannot wait the normal 90-day to 180-day period for routine Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

review and approval. Upon approval, MARAD will begin finalizing vessel operator training agreements, requesting compliance reporting, and supporting information from vessel operators on December 22, 2021. MARAD is, therefore, requesting OMB approval of this collection of information as soon as possible.

Concurrent with OMB clearance of its emergency clearance request, MARAD will continue policy development and follow the normal clearance procedures for a comprehensive information collection associated with its efforts to address the issues of sexual assault and harassment of cadets while training on commercial vessels.

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact Mitch Hudson at 202-302-7223 or at [mitch.hudson@dot.gov](mailto:mitch.hudson@dot.gov).

Sincerely,



Tamekia Flack  
Chief Counsel, Maritime Administration

Enclosures