



SEMAPHORE

Newsletter of the Maritime Law

Association of Australia and New Zealand



United States “Sea Year” Training Paused Following Most Serious Allegations

Investigations have been launched and “Sea Year” training paused following allegations of rampant sexual harassment and assault of students attending the United States Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA) – reportedly even culminating in rape at sea.

The allegations came to light on September 27, when Maritime Legal Aid & Advocacy (MLAA) posted an online [statement](#) provided by a current USMMA student.

“There are more than 50 young, strong, amazing women in my class at the USMMA where I am currently in my Senior/1st Class year,” stated the unidentified student.

“I have not spoken to a single one of those women who has told me that she has not been sexually harassed, sexually assaulted or degraded at some point during the last three years at the Academy or during Sea Year. Most people, and even the leaders of our school, do not seem to understand how serious this problem is, especially at sea.

“In our class of approximately 50 women, I know of at least five women who were forcibly raped during Sea Year. And I am one of them.”

In the detailed statement, the student alleged her incident took place when onboard a Maersk vessel during Sea Year, when she was a 19-year-old in her second year at the USMMA.

Colloquially known as “Kings Point”, the Long Island-located USMMA is one of five federally-funded United States services academies, alongside the Military Academy, Naval Academy, Air Force Academy and Coast Guard Academy. During Sea Year, students spend parts of their second and third years of training at the USMMA onboard United States-flagged ships.

In a December statement to *Semaphore*, a spokesperson for Maersk Line Limited (MLL) – the owner of the unnamed vessel on which the incident is alleged to have occurred – confirmed it had launched an investigation which was expected to conclude soon.

“One of the challenges in the investigation and disciplinary process is the victim still remains anonymous with no charges ever filed,” stated the spokesperson.

“Once the investigation is completed, the company will make a final decision on the employment status of certain crew members currently under suspension.

“We are also working with the United States Government and United States flag industry partners to implement certain measures to restart the Sea Year Cadet Program. These measures include raising awareness on sexual assault/sexual harassment issues, improving communication between USMMA cadets and shoreside company personnel, and enhancing co-ordination with government partners during all phases of the Sea Year Program.”

The allegations drew a prompt joint [statement](#) from United States Deputy Secretary of Transportation Polly Trottenberg and Kings Point community acting maritime administrator Lucinda Lessley.

“We write today to express our unwavering support for the individual who has shared her story of a sexual assault that took place during Sea Year,” they commented.

“We have zero tolerance for sexual assault and sexual harassment at USMMA and in the maritime industry. As we determine the appropriate steps required to increase and ensure the safety of our midshipmen, we pledge to listen to and work closely with the entire Kings Point community.

“... we are committed to moving 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.”

In early November the USMMA, United States Maritime Administration and United States Department of Transport collectively moved to pause Sea Year training.

On December 2 USMMA superintendent Jack Buono addressed a statement to midshipmen advising that decision had been taken because “you deserve a safe and respectful environment that has zero-tolerance for sexual assault and sexual harassment”.

“As part of our commitment to transparency, I want to let you know that we are on track to submit to Congress this month a public, written plan for the resumption of Sea Year that enumerates our new SASH [sexual assault and sexual harassment] prevention and response policies and procedures,” he stated.

“This plan will include strong measures to improve safety for cadets at sea and support a zero-tolerance climate, to help remove barriers to reporting SASH, and to provide unwavering support and assistance to survivors.”

[Ed – at the time of going to publication a further statement was noted on the USMMA website].

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