



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Transportation & Maritime Security Subcommittee Chairwoman Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ)

Taking the Helm: The Commandant's Vision for the U.S. Coast Guard

July 14, 2022

Admiral Fagan, I am pleased to have you appearing here today at the start of your historic tenure as the 27th Commandant of the United States Coast Guard. As the first female service chief in the history of our nation, your leadership shows service members across the globe that the highest ranks of military service are no longer reserved solely for men. You have said you hope to make workforce issues a central tenet of your leadership over the next four years. I hope you will share more about what the Coast Guard is doing to attract a modern workforce that fully represents the diversity of this great nation.

It is my hope that the next four years will be a time of growth and success for the Coast Guard, with more women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQ community rising through the ranks and building off your success. This committee and subcommittee have long been dedicated to developing a diverse and inclusive environment in the Coast Guard, in which every servicemember is free from harassment and retaliation. A safe and welcoming culture that celebrates our differences is vital to creating a workforce that responds to new challenges and meets the diverse needs of the American public.

Currently, the demographics of the Coast Guard fail to reflect the diversity of our Nation. For example, only 6 percent of active-duty members are Black, compared to about 14 percent of the U.S. population, and women make up just 15 percent of the active-duty force. I am particularly concerned that diversity decreases with rank, leaving little opportunity for women and minorities at the top. Admiral Fagan, your leadership as the first female service chief will be essential for expanding opportunities for all women in the Coast Guard.

Today, women struggle to secure limited opportunities for deployments on ships not outfitted for a 21st century workforce inclusive of all genders. Some women report being forced to choose between raising their families and earning promotions. And for people of all genders, races, and ethnicities, in the Coast Guard and throughout the armed forces, there remains a tragically common experience of sexual harassment and assault.

Additionally, any instance of retaliation against a service member who brings forward allegations of wrongdoing is illegal and reprehensible. The Coast Guard still needs to make progress towards improving reporting procedures, protecting whistleblowers, and holding those in leadership positions to account. Admiral Fagan, I hope you will give us your commitment today to improve diversity and equity within the Coast Guard and root out harassment, assault, and retaliation. I also hope you will discuss your vision for the future of the Coast Guard's mission.

An ever-changing geopolitical landscape and new challenges from climate change mean that the Coast Guard has never been more essential to America's national security. Ice level in the Arctic have begun to

recede drastically, creating both environmental catastrophe and conflict over trade routes, natural resources, fishing rights, and global power. In the far North, the Coast Guard's icebreaking capabilities are outmatched by our enemies and the rising threat from China and Russia poses a serious risk to American prosperity and security. In the Indo-Pacific, the Coast Guard is increasing its efforts to maintain freedom of movement in international waters. And here at home, the Coast Guard is working tirelessly to secure our maritime borders and interdict illegal drug trafficking. These are just a few pieces of the global, multifaceted mission the Coast Guard must execute, even as it faces an aging fleet and challenges in recruiting top talent amid stiff competition in the labor force.

The Coast Guard and Congress must work together to ensure the service has all the funding and resources it needs. Admiral Fagan, I thank you again for your service and for appearing before us today. I look forward to hearing from you directly on your vision for the next four years of the U.S. Coast Guard and the future of the service.

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Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978