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February 7, 2023

Dr. Jolene Koester  
Interim Chancellor  
The California State University  
401 Golden Shore  
Long Beach, CA 90802

Dear Chancellor Koester:

On November 28, 2022, California State University (CSU) Maritime Academy (Cal Maritime) President Thomas A. Cropper announced that he would retire from his role on August 1, 2023. This announcement was made approximately two weeks before the publication of a *Los Angeles Times* investigation into claims of widespread sexual misconduct, racism and hostility toward women and transgender and nonbinary students that had “been building for years.”<sup>1</sup> That these incidents occurred at all is unacceptable. That the President of a CSU institution did not, over a 13-month period, adequately respond to public protests drawing attention to systemic failures is inexcusable.

I am aware that CSU in whole, and Cal Maritime in particular, has taken strides to improve the prevention of such incidents and the institution’s response to such claims in recent years, and that enrollment challenges and failed searches have hampered these efforts. I am also aware that incidents of sexual assault, harassment, and discrimination reflect deep issues within the maritime cultural tradition that extend well beyond Cal Maritime. Even so, let us acknowledge the power of leadership. A few right, well-timed words cost nothing yet have the potential to change everything—to set, or re-set, the tone and expectations of the room or the campus, sometimes pivotally.

Some administrators’ strengths lay behind-the-scenes. While the potential for long-standing, positive influence of these personalities should not be undermined, I would stress that the maritime industry and its academies are poised to overhaul failed systems and promote a

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-12-13/csu-maritime-academy-women-trans-nonbinary-harassment?utm\\_id=79715&sfmc\\_id=2396350](https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-12-13/csu-maritime-academy-women-trans-nonbinary-harassment?utm_id=79715&sfmc_id=2396350)

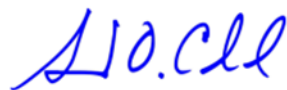
culture that, for the first time in global history, focuses on ensuring the safety, equity, and inclusion of an increasingly diverse workforce. CSU would be remiss not to appoint a new President who prioritizes this mission and ushers such transformation with deliberate leadership, consistent internal and public messaging, and the advancement of responsive reporting systems.

I write to you today as the Congressman from the 24th District of California, the Chairman of the Board of Visitors of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, and the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation in the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I), U.S. House of Representatives. Let me assure you, first, that the appointment of a new Cal Maritime President concerns me from all three of these perspectives; and second, that this correspondence is intended to add urgency to your ongoing effort, not complicate it.

As the only maritime academy west of the Mississippi River, Cal Maritime plays a vital role in educating, training, and licensing officers of the U.S. Merchant Marine and other specialized maritime transportation workers. The maritime industry is essential to our nation's supply chain (over 70% of U.S. imports and exports pass through coastal ports) and is a key part of our nation's defense strategy as a source of service to the Military Sealift Command under the direction of the U.S. Navy. Hence, the health and longevity of the mariner workforce is among the highest priorities of T&I and my Congressional colleagues. As our nation continues on a downward trajectory in mariner recruitment, it is more important than ever that the U.S. Merchant Marine attract and retain recruits, including women and underrepresented minorities. This goal will not be met if our maritime academies—the beginning of the training pipeline—do not secure a culture of respect for all people.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this request, please contact Johanna Montiel at (202)-225-3601 or [Johanna.Montiel@mail.house.gov](mailto:Johanna.Montiel@mail.house.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Salud Carbal".

SALUD CARBAJAL  
Member of Congress