



To the Castine Community,

The COVID-19 pandemic is the most significant challenge Maine Maritime Academy has confronted in its 79-year history. It is an existential challenge that goes beyond the need to protect the health and safety of students, faculty, staff and community. The Academy's mission is to provide a quality education focused on marine and related programs. If the Academy is unable to meet its commitment to enable all students to complete their academic and license requirements, serious questions about the viability of the Academy will be raised. I cannot overstate the severity of the situation. The "Fast Cruise" (as in held fast) that is presently underway alongside the Academy's pier is our current effort to meet our commitment to our students. The Fast Cruise clearly has an impact upon the Castine community and it is in recognition of this impact that I write to seek your understanding and support as the Academy attempts to overcome the unprecedented impact this pandemic wields upon the operation of the institution.

The pandemic forced the Academy to institute changes to our operations, which included closing the campus to students and refunding room and board and significantly limiting on-campus employees while continuing to meet our financial commitment to them with each paycheck. As a result, the Academy has experienced an immediate 16% loss of revenue, with added uncertainty as to future state and federal funding. Our new student admissions rate is down and questions abound as to the number of students who will return to campus when we reopen in August. These are very real considerations in the management of the college. Yet, despite these challenges, the Academy has met its full voluntary financial commitment to the town and many of our students have remained here, protecting the town and its citizens as first responders and firefighters. Our focus remains on our students, especially those who have entrusted the Academy with completion of their education and who eagerly anticipate awarding of their degrees and receipt of their professional mariner licenses.

The fundamental reason for this Fast Cruise is to enable our senior cadets who anticipated graduating this year to complete their program requirements and receive their licenses and degrees. Under federal law, a cadet must earn sufficient operating time to receive their U.S. Coast Guard license. Federal law also links the successful completion of the license requirements to their academic degree such that the degree cannot be awarded independent of the license. Because the COVID-19 pandemic prevents the Academy from taking the training ship to sea for the annual training cruise, cadets in the senior class who needed to complete their final term can neither receive their license nor their degree without this training experience. With the pandemic severely limiting other opportunities for these students to earn their operating time and satisfy the degree requirements, without this Fast Cruise they would have spent four years pursuing a degree that the Academy ultimately would not be able to grant.

The U.S. Coast Guard, which has jurisdiction over our license program, has given explicit approval for our engine cadets to gain operating time at an accelerated rate while the ship is alongside the pier but operating as if at sea. The accelerated time was not granted for the deck cadets, thus most of our senior deck cadets are presently engaged in a program operated by the Maritime Administration that addresses their needs along with a limited number of cadets from other academies. Our training ship requires generators to supply sufficient power to run the ventilation, food storage and preparation, emergency

pumps, and other key systems to support the health, safety and welfare of those aboard. The main engine has not been operated and will only be used intermittently during the day for training purposes. The ship uses low-sulfur fuel as required by federal law to address environmental concerns and the operation of all systems within the ship are regulated by the U.S. Coast Guard. Ongoing efforts by the ship's crew and Academy staff have reduced noise emissions from the ship over the past few days and we will continue to work on those enhancements.

When we first developed the concept of a Fast Cruise, it was not for financial expediency as the overall per-cadet cost is much higher than a customary cruise with multiple port calls. It was wholly on the basis of health and safety that the Fast Cruise concept was conceived. We assessed the health risks of bringing cadets, crew and staff to Castine from across the country and sailing away from immediate shoreside support as too great a risk to justify a traditional cruise. Our double-testing program, overseen by The Jackson Laboratory, has mitigated much of the potential that COVID-19 is present aboard the ship, but even the double-testing is not failsafe. Producing positive pressure within the house of the ship, as the ventilation system does, further mitigates the risk of transmission of the COVID-19 virus if it is present. Remaining pier-side allows us to have immediate shoreside support for any issue that may arise, whether it be pandemic-related or otherwise.

As I noted in my introduction, the Academy is sensitive to the concerns of the Castine community. The Academy has conducted baseline noise level readings throughout the town and I acknowledge that while those readings largely indicate compliance both during day and evening hours, readings provided in one particular location may have exceeded the lowest nighttime level permissible under the town's ordinance, but only by a few decibels. The Academy will continue to mitigate the sound and anticipates bringing in technicians to properly monitor the noise levels and respective frequencies emanating from the ship.

While we work through this very challenging time for the Academy I am asking for forbearance. If I am unable to guarantee that the Academy can provide a complete education to our students, the future of the Academy is threatened and along with it the vitality of a significant source of employment and revenue for this area. In fact, the Federal Reserve Bank just last month reported that Maine leads the region with communities heavily dependent upon colleges for their local economies. If I cannot give these senior cadets the opportunity they need to complete their requirements, they will have no U.S. Coast Guard license or academic degree and little prospect of securing a job in a very difficult economy. The Academy has been a part of the Castine community for many decades and I would like to believe that over the past 10 years, the Town/Gown relationship has been strengthened through enhanced mutual support. I hope that I can count on that continued support to get the Academy through this very difficult time.

With appreciation,

Dr. William J. Brennan
President