

# Coast Guard chief refuses to testify before hearing on racist harassment

By Sarah Cammarata

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The head of the Coast Guard has declined to appear before a joint House Oversight and Homeland Security Committee hearing set for July 16 to address the services' handling of systemic racist harassment within the service, the heads of the committees said Friday.

Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz also refused to appear at a subcommittee hearing in December to discuss how the service is addressing harassment, bullying and retaliation, and the Coast Guard Academy's "responses to disparities identified in the Equity Scorecard review," [according to a July 6 letter](#) from House Oversight Chair Rep. [Carolyn Maloney](#) (D-N.Y.) and Homeland Security Chair Rep. [Bennie Thompson](#) (D-Miss.).

"We are disturbed that a branch of the U.S. military would reject Congressional oversight and surprised that the Coast Guard would not welcome the opportunity to address concerns about the Academy, as well as highlight steps it is taking to implement the recommendations set forth in the [Committees' joint staff report](#)," the lawmakers said in a statement Friday.

Maloney and Thompson said Schultz declined to testify at the remote hearing next week over claims that a White House directive banned virtual testimony from administration witnesses. Lawmakers determine how to conduct congressional hearings, they said, and cited virtual testimony from FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn and Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, as examples.

The Coast Guard did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

At issue is [a Homeland Security Inspector General report](#) in early June that found the Coast Guard Academy was aware of 16 racist harassment cases between 2013 and 2018, of which 11 cases were not investigated thoroughly. The IG also found racist harassment was "underreported" due to concerns over retribution for reporting allegations.

"Specifically, cadets alleged racial slurs, ignorant comments, and instances of disrespect were common on campus, and, when reported to leadership, were not taken seriously," the IG wrote.

"In six incidents, the Academy did not thoroughly investigate the allegations and/or did not discipline cadets. In some instances, cadets committed similar misconduct again," the inspector general wrote.

One case described in the report found in 2016, a third year cadet called a first year cadet a n-----, and another found cadets laughed at a blackface video in a common area in the barracks. Two second year cadets posed in front of a Confederate flag and posted it on social media, in a 2017 complaint.

In one case that includes hate crime allegations, "the Academy did not follow the Coast Guard process for addressing hate incidents," the IG wrote.

"Underreporting is especially concerning because our questionnaire results and interviews indicate harassing behaviors continue at the Academy," it continued.

The academy agreed to make changes, such as mandatory training for personnel and improved tracking of harassment involving race or ethnicity.

The [Dec. 11, 2019, report from the committees](#) backed up the claim that the service did not conduct thorough investigations of harassment and bullying allegations or hold officials accountable for failing to complete investigations. The Coast Guard also did not take “corrective action to address retaliation against individuals who report harassment and bullying.”

That review was based on thousands of pages of documents and information obtained through multiple interviews with Coast Guard personnel, as well as a staff visit to the Coast Guard Academy, according to the report.

The refusal to testify comes after the commandant in his February address pledged to launch a four-year diversity and inclusion plan that would help guide underrepresented servicemembers during their careers in the Coast Guard.