



# *Assistant Commandant's Perspective*

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Throughout our nation's history, the maritime industry has benefited from the Coast Guard's multi-mission nature and ability to maintain the safety and security of our nation's ports, waterways, and coastal areas. Continuing in this tradition, the Coast Guard will work to sustain efficient, consistent, high-quality services to mariners and maritime organizations in all of our mission areas.

We must continue to leverage our multi-mission structure and culture through appropriate allocation of our resources while also partnering with industry, labor, and other maritime stakeholders. This includes our ongoing efforts to revitalize our marine safety missions. We are aggressively working to increase our capacity and our capability, such as by increasing the numbers of marine safety professionals, including civilians recruited from industry. Our success will be measured by the extent we meet the needs of industry in delivering our services. Arguably, our ultimate stakeholder is the mariner, without whom our nation's ports and waterways would come to a standstill.

By supporting our marine transportation system, the mariner's service contributes immeasurably to our nation's economy and to our way of life. The movement of waterborne cargo contributes billions of dollars annually to the nation's gross domestic product and sustains millions of jobs. As we rely on our mariners to "drive" this economic engine, they, in turn, rely on us to keep them at the helm by, among other services, efficiently and appropriately processing their applications for credentials.

As a part of that effort, we have been taking aggressive steps to improve the Mariner Licensing and Documentation (MLD) program, administered by the Coast Guard's National Maritime Center (NMC). The restructuring, centralization, and relocation of the NMC from Arlington, Va., to a new 60,000-square-foot facility in Martinsburg, W.Va., was completed at the end of 2007.

Centralization began with transferring certain licensing evaluation and issuance functions from Regional Examination Centers to the NMC. This centralization of effort has provided a greater opportunity to gain economies of scale while reducing backlogs, ensuring that credentials are only issued to qualified persons, reducing the time it takes for mariners to receive their credentials, providing uniformity in interpretation of regulations, and improving customer service.

Growing demand for merchant mariner credentials will continue to test the MLD program's ability to improve efficiency and provide timely service. With a renewed and sustained focus, the Coast Guard men and women who make up the Mariner Licensing and Documentation program will continue to rise to this challenge and deliver tangible results.

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