

Kingston, NY -- Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today wrote to leaders of the House Committee on Veteran's Affairs to request legislative hearings on The World War II Mariners Service Act (H.R. 1288) -- legislation that Hinchey has co-sponsored to help Merchant Marine Veterans provide proof of their service. Current laws enable the seamen to apply for veteran status with the Department of Veterans' Affairs but the documentation required for proving eligibility is extremely difficult or sometimes impossible to locate. Hinchey says the bill he supports would allow the Veterans Administration to accept a wider array of documentation as proof of service.

"As a Navy veteran, I have an official record that proves my military service but many of my compatriots who served in the Merchant Marine have no straightforward paperwork documenting their service and honorable discharge," said Hinchey. "Merchant Marines suffered a higher percentage of wartime casualties than any other service during World War II. These veterans should not be denied the benefits they are owed because of rigid paperwork requirements."

Under current rules, a Merchant Marine can apply for veteran status using only a limited set of records, including a certificate of shipping and discharge forms, continuous deck or engine logbooks, and shipping company records that indicate the vessel names and dates of voyages. Unfortunately, these forms of documentation can be difficult and in some cases impossible to locate. Records of seamen shipped or discharged were not kept by order of the Coast Guard, the deck or engine logbooks were destroyed by the War Shipping Administration during the 1970s because they were too costly to maintain, and shipping company records indicating vessel names and dates of voyages likely never existed because written communications relating to the movement of supplies and troops was forbidden by US military commanders during the war.

H.R. 1288 would expand the acceptable forms of documentation to include Social Security Administration records, validated testimony by the applicant or closest living relative, and other official records that provide sufficient proof of service.

A veteran of the U.S. Navy, Hinchey served in the Pacific on the destroyer U.S.S. Marshall after graduating from high school. Hinchey strongly encourages any veterans of the Merchant Marines to contact his office if they need assistance in obtaining the benefits they are owed.

The full text of Hinchey's letter follows. A PDF can be found [here](#).

July 20, 2011

The Honorable Jeff Miller
Chairman
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
335 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bob Filner
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
333 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Miller and Ranking Member Filner:

I respectfully request the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs hold a legislative hearing on H.R. 1288, The World War II Mariner Service Act. This bill will expand the requirements for official documentation accepted by the Secretary of Homeland Security in evaluating the veteran status of our Merchant Marines.

As you may know, during World War II, the private citizens who made up the Merchant Marines served as part of an auxiliary force to the United States Navy. Current laws enable these seamen to apply for veteran status with the Department of Veterans Affairs but the documentation required for proving eligibility is extremely difficult or sometimes impossible to locate for many of these men and women. Many people who are entitled to benefits because of wartime service to their country are not receiving them because we have made the requirements for documentation too limited. It is our duty as elected representatives to do our utmost for these honorable citizens and this bill will make that possible.

As a Navy veteran, I have an official record that proves my military service but many of my compatriots who served in the Merchant Marine have no straightforward paperwork documenting their service and honorable discharge. Because the Merchant Marine did not keep such records for their sailors, I strongly believe that we need to expand the current list of approved documentation before it is too late for many to claim their veteran's benefits. As a cosponsor of H.R. 1288, I hope that you will expeditiously conduct a legislative hearing on this bill so that those Merchant Marines still living can receive the veterans' statuses that they deserve.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Hinchey

Member of Congress