

Frequently Asked Questions: Reduced Sea Service for Able Seaman (AB)

1. Able Seaman – What happened?

On December 22, 2023, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2024, (Pub. Law 118-31) Section 3534(j) was signed into law. Currently this law is temporary and is set to expire in 3 years, on December 22, 2026.

2. How did this change requirements for specific Able Seaman endorsements?

It reduced overall service requirements for three Able Seaman endorsements.

- AB-Unlimited overall service was reduced from 1,080 days to 540 days total service.
- AB-Limited overall service was reduced from 540 days to 360 total service.
- AB-Special overall service was reduced from 360 days to 180 days total service.

3. What did not change for Able Seaman-Unlimited and Able Seaman-Limited?

- AB-Unlimited still requires all service to be on oceans or Great Lakes.
- AB-Limited still requires all service to be on vessels of 100 GRT or more.
- AB-Special still requires all service to be on navigable waters of the U.S.

4. Is this change retroactive?

No, if the application has been processed and an MMC issued prior to December 22, 2023, the National Maritime Center (NMC) will not go back and re-evaluate.

If a mariner previously was issued Able Seaman-OSV, Fish, or Sail due to less than 360 days qualifying service, a new application and fees must be submitted.

5. What if I have a current application in awaiting information (AI) status and the reduction in sea service now allows me to receive or be approved to test for a higher AB then I applied for?

These applications have been identified and they are being re-evaluated, and updated AI letters will be sent.

6. What if I currently have an approved to test (ATT) letter for AB-OSV, Fish, or Sail and now meet examinations requirements for AB-Special?

For AB applications in ATT as of December 22, 2023, once examinations are successfully passed, the requested AB-OSV, Fish, Sail, and/or MODU will be issued as requested along with AB-Special.

7. Does this change impact how my AB course is applied to required service when applicable?

- If the course is approved is for a specified number of days, such as 30, 60, or 180, no change.
- If the course is approved for a specific AB endorsement such as AB-Fish, no change.
- If the course approval is for 1/3 or 2/3 of the required sea service, this will be applied to the new service requirements accordingly.

8. If an applicant believes an error was made, what steps should be taken?

The mariner may contact the NMC at 1-888-427-5662 or via e-mail to iasknmc@uscg.mil. If the mariner is still not satisfied, the reconsideration process is available.