



October 31, 2024

The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Chair
Committee on Commerce, Science and
Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ted Cruz, Ranking
Committee on Commerce, Science and
Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sam Graves, Chair
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen, Ranking
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, Chair Graves, and Ranking Member Larsen:

On behalf of the undersigned maritime and transportation labor organizations, we are writing to express our strong support for legislation calling for the establishment of a National Marketing Campaign for the U.S.-flag Merchant Marine. Specifically, we ask that you support a provision included in the House-passed version of the FY'25 national defense authorizations legislation, which authorizes the Maritime Administration to contract with a third-party public relations firm to develop and execute a marketing plan to encourage young Americans to consider a career in our industry.

As you know, this approach has helped recruit individuals for military service. Like the military, the U.S.-flag maritime industry faces workforce challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other economic and lifestyle factors. However, thanks in part to aggressive advertising, the services are all expected to hit their recruitment goals—but the merchant marine, which the Military Sealift Command and U.S. Transportation Command depend upon for logistics movements for the Department of Defense has been unsuccessful in regaining their lost workforce.

Despite its mission as a promotional agency, the Maritime Administration has not been funded or staffed to carry out the type of outreach necessary to reach today's young people. Similarly, notwithstanding our organizations' efforts to promote the maritime industry and to recruit individuals for employment aboard U.S.-flag vessels, it is clear we need a significant, concentrated effort to better educate young people about the many opportunities available in the maritime industry and the various paths available for them to become a mariner, including enrollment at the United States Merchant Marine Academy or at one of the six state maritime academies, participation in a Department of Labor-approved apprenticeship course available to anyone who can pass an 8th-grade equivalency exam, or through one of the labor-management training institutions our organizations operate in conjunction with U.S.-flag carriers.

We believe that a maritime career offers a rewarding life that allows hardworking Americans to not only climb the ladder of success and provide for their families but also serve our country as part of America's fourth arm of defense.

Again, we ask that you support the provision authorizing this critically important program.

Respectfully,

Willie Barrere, President, American Maritime Officers

Mark Clements, Executive Secretary-Treasurer, AFL-CIO Maritime Trades Department

David Connolly, President, Sailors' Union of the Pacific

David Heindel, President, Seafarers International Union

Don Marcus, President, International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots

Anthony Poplawski, President, Marine Firemen's Union

Greg Regan, President, Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO

Adam Vokac, President, Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association