C. James Patti
Chairman

R. Christian Johnsen
Secretary-Treasurer

January 19, 2021

General Stephen R. Lyons, Commander
United States Transportation Command
508 Scott Drive
Scott Air Force Base, IL 62225 – 5357

The Honorable Douglas Burnett, Acting Administrator and Chief Counsel
United States Maritime Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: ***Access to COVID-19 Vaccine for Deep-Sea Mariners***

Dear General Lyons and Acting Administrator Burnett:

On behalf of the undersigned U.S.-flag shipping companies, maritime labor organizations and related maritime associations belonging to the USA Maritime Coalition we are writing to urge that the 3,500 licensed and unlicensed American merchant mariners who work aboard militarily useful U.S.-flag vessels enrolled in the Maritime Security Program as well as aboard other U.S.-flag vessels engaged in the carriage of government and commercial cargo in our nation's foreign trades receive immediate access to the vaccines necessary to combat COVID-19. We make this request to ensure that these American merchant mariners, who are an irreplaceable component of our nation's defense sealift readiness capability, remain available to crew the vessels necessary to support American troops deployed overseas and to protect America's economic and military security. In addition, many of these mariners, already designated critical transportation infrastructure workers, enable US flag ships and logistical supply lines to bring the medicine, PPE, food, energy and thousands of other supplies desperately needed by those suffering from COVID in the USA and around the world.

It is not an exaggeration to warn that the military and economic security of our nation will be at risk if the distribution of vaccines to seafarers is not handled in the most expeditious manner possible. As a result of the time spent at sea and the number of countries visited by merchant mariners in the course of their employment, this workforce is at significant risk of exposure and transmission of COVID-19. It is important to emphasize that when a crewmember tests positive for COVID-19 the vessel**,** depending on the jurisdiction, may be taken out of service and it, along with the entire crew, are placed into quarantine for an undetermined

period of time. The likely result is that the vessel's cargo will not arrive at its destination when expected and when needed. In the case of commercial cargo, this will have a detrimental impact on the domestic economy, American consumers and businesses. In the case of military cargo, the impact will be even more severe, with the lives of American troops overseas endangered and the ability of the Department of Defense to protect the interests of the United States threatened.

Seafarers live and work closely together in multi-generational settings aboard ship for months at a time. The close contact and risk of exposure aboard ship is exacerbated by the lack of medical care when mariners become infected while engaged in extended foreign voyages or when routinely denied shoreside access to medical care in foreign ports. Professional medical care and hospital equipment is simply not available aboard merchant ships. One infected crew member may readily infect the entire ship's crew, most often with no medivac available and frequently with no port of refuge which will permit ill seafarers to disembark and seek medical care.

American seafarers on internationally trading U.S.-flag vessels represent a fraction of the one percent of the military's active duty force. Our numbers are not great, but we play an outsized role in maintaining the economic and military security of our nation. Because of the time and specialized training necessary to provide professional seafarers and the critical nature of efficient movement of basic goods and commodities to and from our shores and to our military bases overseas, personnel losses due to illness or death will have a disproportionately grave impact on our transportation infrastructure and our commercial sealift readiness capability.

We attach for your information a recent communication from the Presidents of America's maritime unions to the National Governors' Association further highlighting the importance of ensuring that American mariners have early and assured access to the vaccines as well as a statement from the Department of Defense dated March 2020 regarding the importance of protecting the critical defense industrial base of which American mariners are a key component.

Thank you for your consideration. We stand ready to provide whatever additional information you may require.

Respectfully submitted,

American Maritime Congress
American Maritime Officers
American Maritime Officers Service
American Roll-on Roll-off Carrier, LLC
American President Lines LLC
Bold Ocean LLC
Hapag-Lloyd USA, LLC
International Organization of Masters, Mates and Pilots
Keystone Shipping
Liberty Maritime Corporation
Maersk Line, Limited
Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association
Maritime Institute (MIRAID)
Sailors Union of the Pacific
Seafarers International Union
Transportation Institute
U.S. Ocean
U.S. Shipping Corp
Waterman Logistics, Inc.

cc: Vice Admiral Dee Mewbourne, Deputy Commander, United States Transportation Command
cc: The Honorable Kevin Tokarski, Associate Administrator for Strategic Sealift, United States Maritime Administration