



MARITIME EXCHANGE

for the Delaware River and Bay

Leading the Way to Port Progress

John T. Reynolds, Chairman
Uwe Schulz, Vice Chairman
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December 7, 2022

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen, Chairwoman
Senate Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee
506 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran, Ranking Member
Senate Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: FY23 Funding for NOAA Survey Vessels/Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System O&M

Dear Chairwoman Shaheen and Ranking Member Moran:

The Maritime Exchange for the Delaware River and Bay joins the National Association of Maritime Organizations and other concerned waterway stakeholders in requesting funds for two very important NOAA programs. First is a request for \$95 million dollars in FY23 funding for the recapitalization of NOAA's oldest two survey vessels: the S/V FAIRWEATHER and the S/V RAINIER. The second involves \$12 million request for annual Operations & Maintenance (O&M) funding for NOAA's Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System (PORTS®) Program.

The Maritime Exchange is a nonprofit association representing port and related interest in Southeastern Pennsylvania, Southern New Jersey, and Delaware. NOAA programs are extremely important to safe, efficient, and environmentally healthy operations in the tristate region.

Survey Vessels

Homeported in the Pacific Northwest, the S/V FAIRWEATHER and the S/V RAINIER have served our nation well since their construction in 1968, and the commercial maritime industry receives multiple benefits from the hydrographic surveys, technology development, and accurate technical data they provide. These larger survey vessels provide a safe operating platform to house specialized support survey vessels and crew and allow real-world applications to promote NOAA hydrographer's cutting-edge technological advancements. Through these vessels, NOAA must be able to maintain hydrographic services in the harsh environments on the Pacific with the specialized focus to perform across Alaska, the Arctic and the broader Pacific.

As is typical with long-term investments, their recapitalization has been delayed to the point that both vessels routinely suffer failures in dangerous environments that often require unscheduled repairs while maintenance costs continue to escalate. This request is specific to the funding to replace these crucial survey vessels at an estimated \$95 million.

If these ships are decommissioned without replacement, NOAA will lose 70% of its in-house hydrographic surveying capability. This loss would also significantly reduce NOAA's technical expertise in hydrography, which is essential to responsibly contract for hydrographic surveying services.

PORTS® Program

Currently 38 PORTS® Programs exist throughout the country, serving 84 top U.S. seaports or military installations. PORTS® operations and maintenance costs are funded by a patchwork of different agreements with diverse local sponsors. The unstructured nature of PORTS® O&M funding has frequently placed vital sensors in jeopardy of deactivation as local funding sources diminish or disappear entirely. In far too many cases, including on the Delaware River, equipment has failed for lack of funding.

By federalizing PORTS® Operations and Maintenance (O&M) funding at only \$12 million per year, NOAA could stabilize ongoing O&M, perform emergency maintenance, and recapitalize oceanographic sensors for the existing and proposed PORTS® installations. This will ensure the sustainability of a program that has become essential for safe navigation, eliminating often tenuous local funding streams, and the inequity of requiring one partner to fund a system that is broadly used by many others as a public good.

Congress routinely cites the importance of maintaining the nation's maritime supply chain. Funding the NOAA survey vessels and PORTS O&M will go a long way toward meeting these essential goals.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our views. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,



Lisa B. Humber
President