February 2, 2021

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-232, The Capitol
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Republican Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Republican Leader
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Schumer, Senate Republican Leader McConnell, and House Republican Leader McCarthy,

As Congress continues the process of developing the next COVID-19 relief package, it is critical that this package include emergency relief for our Nation’s maritime transportation system. In the year since the virus was first detected in the United States the maritime industry has endured significant hardships and has experienced substantial impacts to business. Congress must take immediate steps to ensure that the whole of the maritime transportation system has the resources necessary to address the unique and unexpected challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our maritime transportation system and the critical workers employed throughout this system have kept vital goods moving to medical professionals and first responders, have ensured that our Nation’s shelves remain stocked, and have enabled commerce to continue flowing during these uncertain times. Ports that are located in rural areas have propped up local economies, dispensing critical public services while providing assistance to small businesses, oftentimes at the ports’ own expense. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, over 650,000 Americans were directly employed in jobs generated through the movement of marine cargo and through vessel activity while 30.8 million total jobs were supported by cargo moving through America’s deep-draft ports.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 crisis has had a significantly negative impact on the maritime industry. Despite container surges at several large ports, commercial cargo volumes have plummeted across the industry – total waterborne trade volume is down 5.5% compared to last year, while the value of this trade has crashed by 12.7% totaling $200 billion. Passenger movements remain virtually nonexistent with operations not expected to resume for months. Expenses have greatly increased due to COVID-19 protocols and precautions that have been put in place to ensure the health and safety of staff, and these extra costs borne by the industry to keep supply lines open are above and beyond the normal costs of operations.

With an uncertain outlook, these trends are likely to continue and intensify as the COVID-19 pandemic peaks over the coming months. To date, no dedicated funding has been provided in any of the COVID-19 legislative packages to assist the maritime transportation system despite emergency relief being provided to other modes of transportation.

We urge you to include emergency relief for the maritime industry in the next COVID-19 package through the Maritime Transportation System Emergency Relief Program, which was created by the National Defense Authorization Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-283). This new program, the only one of its kind, authorizes the Maritime Administration to solicit applications for aid from those across the maritime industry, both inland and coastal, and provide grants to those most in need due to emergencies or disasters. This includes aid to help mitigate the impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
It is essential that the U.S. maritime industry maintain a state of readiness and sustain our critical responsibility in the supply chains that provide food, medical equipment, and other essential goods for the citizens of this country. By providing this emergency relief Congress will help ensure that maritime operations continue at the high level that Americans have come to depend on. We hope that you can provide this critical emergency relief to the maritime industry as additional COVID-19 response measures are considered.

Sincerely,

American Association of Port Authorities
American Great Lakes Ports Association
Association of Ship Brokers and Agents
Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway Association
Big River Coalition
California Association of Port Authorities
Columbia River Steamship Operators Association
Connecticut Maritime Association
Dredging Contractors of America
Florida Ports Council
Gulf Ports Association
Inland Rivers, Ports and Terminals, Inc.
International Freight Forwarders & Customs Brokers Association of New Orleans
International Longshoremen’s Association, AFL-CIO, CLC
International Longshore and Warehouse Union
International Propeller Club of the United States
Jacksonville Marine Transportation Exchange
Marine Exchange of the Puget Sound
Maritime Association of the Port of New York / New Jersey
Maritime Exchange for the Delaware River and Bay
National Association of Maritime Organizations
National Association of Waterfront Employers
National Maritime Safety Association
National Waterways Conference
North Atlantic Ports Association
Louisiana Maritime Association
Oregon Public Ports Association
Pacific Northwest Waterways Association
Passenger Vessel Association
Ports Association of Louisiana
The Propeller Club of New Orleans
Transportation Trades Department, AFL–CIO
Virginia Maritime Association
Washington Public Ports Association
Waterways Council, Inc
West Gulf Maritime Association
World Trade Center of New Orleans