



April 3, 2024

Ann Phillips
Maritime Administrator
Maritime Administration
United States Department of Transportation

Dear RADM Phillips:

On behalf of the men and women of maritime labor, we are writing to you today to discuss our concerns regarding the upcoming recovery and repair work on the Francis Scott Key Bridge, and the reopening of the Helen Delich Bentley Port of Baltimore. The Port of Baltimore is a critical seaport for the United States, one that mariners and our members have been sailing to and from for centuries, and we are fully committed to working with you, the various state and local agencies, and the rest of the federal government to ensure a speedy and complete recovery from the bridge allision tragedy that occurred on March 26th.

During a call with Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg and NEC Director Lael Brainard, last week with various stakeholders, including maritime labor, a suggestion was made for Jones Act waivers as a response to this crisis.

Maritime labor firmly believes that any calls for Jones Act waivers as part of the recovery effort for the Port of Baltimore are premature.

To be clear, we fully recognize the critical need to reopen the port and we expect and demand that every effort be made to do so as rapidly as possible. As noted, our members sail from Baltimore, and our brothers and sisters in various shoreside jobs including truckers, longshoremen, and other trades are looking at a long period of no work. It is in the best interests of everyone to get the Port open as soon as possible, and we would not stand in the way of that work.

However, we have found over the years that in times of crisis, whether they be natural disasters or man-made disasters, those who oppose America's cabotage laws begin making demands for waivers and exceptions regardless of necessity or need, as a means of undermining those laws. This crisis has been no different, with those opposed to the Jones Act, the Dredging Act and other cabotage laws coming out with public demands for waivers of those laws, some even before rescue and recovery efforts for the men on the bridge when it collapsed were completed.

We believe that existing law should be followed to the letter, and any potential Jones Act or other cabotage law waivers should be processed in accordance with that law, with specific vessel names, purposes, length of waivers, time limits and transparency.

Maritime labor has never stood in the way of a legitimate waiver of America's cabotage laws when it has been necessary for national security. At the same time, we have opposed every unnecessary or political waiver of those laws, and we would do so again here.

We look forward to working together with you and the rest of the federal government to ensure that the Port of Baltimore reopens as soon as possible, and we stand ready to work with you to ensure that future accidents of this magnitude are averted whenever and wherever possible.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you for your understanding, and your continued support of the United States Merchant Marine.

Sincerely,

American Maritime Officers
International Organization of Masters, Mates and Pilots
Marine Engineers Beneficial Association
Maritime Trades Department (AFL-CIO)
Seafarers International Union
Transportation Trades Department (AFL-CIO)

cc: Pete Buttigieg, Secretary of Transportation
Troy A. Miller, Commissioner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection
Shalanda Young, Director, Office of Management and Budget
Livia Shmavonian, Director, Made in America Office