

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 31, 2025

The Honorable Steve Womack
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing,
and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
2358-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable James Clyburn
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing,
and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
2083 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Womack and Ranking Member Clyburn:

We are writing to request that your Subcommittee include full funding at the authorized amount for the Maritime Security Program (MSP) in your Fiscal Year 2026 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD) Appropriations Bill. We also request that a defense 302(b) allocation in the authorized amount be provided to the THUD Appropriations Subcommittee to ensure sufficient funding for MSP as has been done in preceding years.

MSP is a vital component of our military strategic sealift and global response capability. It is designed to ensure that the United States has the U.S.-flag commercial sealift readiness capability and trained U.S. citizen merchant mariners available in times of war or national emergencies. MSP also ensures that the U.S. can provide our troops overseas with the supplies and equipment necessary to do their jobs on behalf of our nation.

In testimony on April 11, 2024 before the House Armed Services Committee's Readiness and Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittees' hearing – "Posture And Readiness Of The Mobility Enterprise", General Jacqueline D. Van Ovost, Commander of the United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM), emphasized the importance of MSP. She stated, "We fully support the MSP which provides the DoD with assured access to 60 U.S flag sealift vessels." Her testimony also emphasized the importance of the U.S. merchant mariner workforce in our nation's defense, as well as the need for greater U.S. labor supply – "Merchant Mariner readiness requires continued assessment to ensure an adequately trained supply of merchant mariners to crew our surge fleet while minimizing impacts to commercial industry. USTRANSCOM and Military Sealift Command depend on the U.S.-flag merchant marine fleet, with the security benefits of American crews, to move sensitive defense materials." At that hearing, Rear Admiral Ann Phillips, Administrator of the Maritime Administration (MARAD) stated, "There are 60 commercially viable, militarily useful vessels enrolled in MSP. These vessels are active in international trade and are on-call to meet the nation's need for sustained military sealift capacity. The MSP supports and sustains the merchant mariner base by providing employment for 2,400 highly trained, skilled U.S. merchant mariners who may also crew the U.S. Government-owned surge sealift fleet when activated. The MSP also supports more than 5,000 additional shore-side jobs in the maritime industry."

As a public-private partnership between the U.S. government and the U.S.-flag shipping industry, MSP provides the Department of Defense (DOD) assured access to privately-owned commercial shipping assets, related global intermodal systems, and the active pool of U.S citizen mariners necessary to support America's defense objectives around the world. This cost-effective program utilizes existing U.S. maritime private sector capabilities at a fraction of the cost of what it would take if the Federal government were to replicate the vessel capacity and global intermodal systems made available to DOD by MSP contractors who continuously develop

and maintain modern logistics systems for commercial and defense purposes. The cost to the Federal government of replicating just the vessel capacity is estimated at \$13 billion. USTRANSCOM has estimated an additional cost of \$52 billion to replicate the global intermodal system that is made available to the DOD by MSP participants. In contrast, the MSP, at the funding level requested, will provide DOD with U.S.-flag, U.S.-crewed militarily-useful commercial vessels and worldwide logistics systems at a fraction of the estimated \$65 billion it would cost the Federal government to do this job itself.

In closing, without a viable U.S.-flag commercial fleet and the American merchant mariners this fleet supports, the United States would be unable to deploy its military forces on a global basis and to deliver the supplies and equipment American troops need to do their job on behalf of the American people.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

[[SIGNATURES]]