



A JOINT LETTER FROM KEY MARITIME PARTNERS

June 6, 2025

The Honorable Ted Cruz
Chair
Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science,
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U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chair
Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

SUBJ: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System and Integrated Ocean Observing System

Dear Committee Chairs and Ranking Members:

The American Association of Port Authorities (AAPA), the American Pilots' Association (APA), the Chamber of Shipping of America (CSA), the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), the American Waterways Operators (AWO), the International Organization of Masters, Mates and Pilots (IOMM&P), and the Waterways Council, Inc. (WCI) urge you to take action to protect the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System (PORTS) and Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS). We have become aware that funding for PORTS and IOOS is in jeopardy as efforts to eliminate government waste move forward. We think this would be a grave mistake as neither of these programs should in any way be viewed as "waste." On behalf of our collective memberships and in the strongest possible terms, we urge you to ensure full funding for these vital navigation safety systems.

The AAPA is the unified voice of the seaport industry in the Americas, representing more than 130 public port authorities in the U.S., Canada, the Caribbean and Latin America. For more than a century, AAPA membership has empowered port authorities and their maritime industry partners to serve global customers and create economic and social value for their communities. AAPA events, resources and partnerships connect, inform, and unify seaport leaders and maritime professionals who deliver prosperity around the western hemisphere. For its U.S. members, AAPA provides compelling advocacy and effective public outreach to influence seaports' most urgent public policy issues.

APA has been the national association of professional maritime pilots since 1884, making APA one of the oldest trade associations in the United States. Virtually all the more than 1,250 State-licensed pilots working in the U.S. coastal ports and approaches, as well as all the U.S. registered pilots operating in the Great Lakes system under authorization by the Coast Guard, belong to APA member pilot groups. These pilots handle well over 90 percent of all large ocean-going vessels moving in international trade in the waterways of the United States. The role and official responsibility of these pilots is to protect the safety of navigation and the marine environment in the waters for which they are licensed and to keep maritime commerce flowing safely, efficiently, and securely.

The CSA represents U.S. based companies that either own, operate or charter oceangoing tank, container, or dry bulk vessels engaged in both the domestic and international trades and companies that maintain a commercial interest in the operation of such oceangoing vessels. Current members include companies that own or operate U.S. flag or foreign-flag vessels.

CLIA represents a diverse and influential cruise industry, including ocean, river, and specialty cruise lines, maritime leaders, ports, destinations, shipyards, and travel professionals. As the leading trade association, CLIA advocates for safe, sustainable cruise operations, supports tourism strategies that benefit communities, and promotes innovation toward net-zero emissions by 2050. With a global presence, CLIA provides resources, expertise, and policy leadership to protect and promote the industry's responsible growth.

The AWO is the tugboat, towboat and barge industry's advocate, resource, and united voice for safe, sustainable, and efficient transportation on America's waterways, oceans, and coasts. AWO members operate on the rivers, coasts, Great Lakes, and harbors of the United States, moving vital commodities safely, reducing air emissions, water pollution, and highway congestion, protecting homeland security, and providing family-wage jobs for tens of thousands of Americans. AWO promotes the long-term economic soundness of the industry and works to enhance its ability to provide safe, efficient, and environmentally responsible transportation.

The IOMM&P is a maritime union representing the masters and navigational watch officers on U.S. flagged ships and pilots on both U.S. and foreign flagged ships engaged in international trade. The masters have overall responsibility for the efficient operation and safety of the ship, and the pilot has responsibility for the safe direction and control of the movement of the ship in designated waters while taking into consideration the public interest in protecting the marine environment. IOMM&P also represents pilot boat crews at a number of East Coast pilot associations.

WCI is the national public policy organization advocating for a modern and well-maintained national system of ports and inland waterways. WCI members include shippers and receivers of our nation's bulk commodities, representing diverse commodities from agriculture, manufacturing, and energy entities from around the country.

The PORTS program provides real-time oceanographic and other navigation data to support safe and efficient navigation in U.S. waters. PORTS improves the safety and efficiency of vessel navigation through the integration of real-time environmental observations, forecasts, and other geospatial information. PORTS also measures and disseminates information related to tides, currents, salinity, and meteorological parameters (e.g., winds, atmospheric pressure, air, and water temperature) that are essential to the safe navigation of vessels carrying trillions of dollars of cargo and hundreds of thousands of passengers each year. Likewise, IOOS uses buoys, submersible drones, and radar installations to track water temperature, wind speed, atmospheric pressure, wave speeds, swell heights, and current strengths. Both PORTS and IOOS are critical tools for professional mariners, including pilots, as they navigate vessels into, out of, and through our ports and along coastal waterways and keep our Nation's maritime commerce moving safely and efficiently. Accordingly, AAPA, APA, CSA, CLIA, AWO, IOMM&P, and WCI share the strong view that these programs must continue to be fully funded.

The need for the information provided by PORTS and IOOS has never been greater. These systems provide professional mariners, including pilots, with highly accurate, reliable, repeatable, and real-time information as they safely maneuver all manner of vessels – tankers, containers, cruise, general cargo, and tugs/barges – in narrow channels and in close proximity to other vessels and navigational hazards. The safe, efficient, and environmentally-responsible movement of vessels carrying critical cargo and passengers is, of course, the top priority of all signatories to this letter. Such information will become even more important in the future as the size

of ships entering U.S. waterways – length, beam, and draft – will continue to dramatically outpace channel expansion in America’s ports. Put another way, ships are getting larger and larger, but channels are getting correspondingly smaller. Further, the volume of maritime commerce continues to grow and the vast majority (95%) of economic trade enters and leaves the United States via maritime shipping. As a result, port authorities, pilots, shipping companies, and masters and mates will need PORTS, IOOS, and other sources of critical navigation information even more as they go about their vital work of supporting the economy and protecting the marine environment.

We – AAPA, APA, CSA, CLIA, AWO, IOMM&P, and WCI – are of the strong collective view that ceasing or even reducing funding for PORTS and IOOS would be a mistake that would have significant negative impacts on safety of navigation on America’s waterways and the efficient movement of goods and passengers. Given the relatively small cost for the federal government to maintain PORTS and IOOS, combined with the enormous potential costs (in terms of safety of life at sea, damage to the environment, and port delays in the event of a shipping accident) of a substantial reduction in navigation safety in near-coastal, harbor entrance and approach, and inland waters, it is “penny wise and pound foolish” for these programs to be cut or to have their funding reduced. We support NOAA’s efforts to meet its navigational safety obligations and strongly recommend that funding be maintained for PORTS and IOOS.

Respectfully,

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