Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 17, 2016

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Chairman
Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
2358-A Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Price
Ranking Member
Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
2358-A Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Price,

We thank you for your past support for the State Maritime Academies (SMAs) and urge you to support robust levels of funding for Fiscal Year 2017, particularly for the National Security Multi-Mission Vessel (NSMV) program. While the vast majority of operating revenues for the SMAs come from non-federal sources such as tuition and state funding, the federal funding that the SMAs receive is critical to their mission.

Each year, the American domestic maritime industry contributes nearly 500,000 jobs and $100 billion in economic impact, providing tens of billions of dollars in wages and benefits. U.S.-licensed mariners also serve as eyes and ears on our inland and coastal waterways and provide critical sealift capacity in support of our armed services at home and abroad. Our nation has long maintained a strong maritime industry because of these economic and national security benefits.

Increased industry need for federally licensed mariners means good-paying jobs are being created in this sector of our economy. However, the U.S. is facing an impending shortage of trained mariners. Such a shortage will have a severely negative impact on national and economic security, making the work of the six SMAs especially important. As you know SMAs are located across the country and produce more than 70 percent of the newly U.S.-licensed merchant marine officers each year. Collectively, the SMAs have a nearly 100 percent placement rate for their licensed graduates, who come from all 50 states.

The president's proposed budget includes critical funding to continue the federal-state partnership through which SMAs provide first-class, four-year STEM degrees to licensed graduates who immediately enter the workforce. However, we are concerned that the request does not take the necessary steps toward investing in the National Security Multi-Mission Vessel (NSMV) program. For nearly 150 years, the Federal government has provided training vessels to the SMAs, and in return, the academies have produced the highest-quality licensed mariners, who have served this country in war and peace. New NSMVs would be federally-owned assets that would replace the current, aging mixture of repurposed vessels that are on average more than 35 years old. Crucially, these vessels would be assigned by the government to the SMAs for use as training ships. Such funding is particularly necessary given that the largest training ship, the *T/S Empire State VI*, is already near the end of its useful life. Should this vessel need to be taken offline before the first NSMV is completed, it would result in a crushing disruption in our nation's ability to train new mariners.

Recently, Gen. Darren W. McDew, the commander of the U.S. Transportation Command, which oversees military sealift, spoke to the critical role that commercial mariners play in national security. He highlighted, "the reality that the mariners who move international trade and those who transport wartime cargo come from the same dwindling pool of U.S. mariners." These are the very mariners who graduated from America's six SMAs and just one more reason why this funding is so important.

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We thank you again for your previous support and urge your continued attention to this issue by providing robust funding for the State Maritime Academies programs. We particularly urge funding for the NSMV program at a level that addresses the critical requirement for mariners highlighted by Gen. McDew and others. We look forward to working with you in order to sustain the mission of our State Maritime Academies.

Sincerely,

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Member of Congress

JOSEPH CROWLEY
Member of Congress

JOE COURTNEY
Member of Congress

CHARLES B. RANGEL
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