



March 20, 2020

Vice President Mike Pence
The White House
Office of the Vice President
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Vice President Pence:

The National Association of Waterfront Employers (NAWE), the World Shipping Council (WSC) and the Chamber of Shipping of America (CSA) represent, respectively, the U.S. marine terminal operator and stevedoring industry, the liner shipping industry, which operates container ships, vehicle carriers and roll-on/roll-off ships in U.S. - international service, and shipowners, operators and charterers of U.S.-based shipping companies operating vessels in U.S. domestic and international trade. Together, we are the businesses that transport, load and discharge U.S. export and import cargoes at U.S. ports. We thank you for your hard work and diligence in leading the efforts to respond to the COVID-19 virus outbreak.

In this time of global crisis, it is more important than ever to keep supply chains connected and maritime trade and transport moving. 90% of U.S. - international trade is transported by commercial shipping, which moves manufactured goods (including vital medical supplies, personal protective equipment, products sold in retail stores and supermarkets and spare parts), as well as food, raw materials and energy products.

The U.S. maritime transportation system is comprised of ships, ports, marine terminals, intermodal connectors – including truck and rail – and warehousing, all of which must be operational in order for cargo to move. If one link in the supply chain breaks, the impact will reverberate throughout the system. As the COVID-19 outbreak continues, it is vital for the United States to keep export and import cargoes flowing by providing access for commercial ships to U.S. ports, promoting safe and efficient cargo loading, unloading, clearance and inland transportation operations, and facilitating the changeover of ships' crews with as few obstacles as possible.

Shipping lines, marine terminal operators and stevedoring companies are executing their continuity of operations plans and these plans are working. However, we now face unprecedented situations that, if not addressed, will impact the economic security of the nation. NAWE, WSC and CSA therefore respectfully offer the following recommendations to help keep cargo flowing efficiently into and out of the United States:

- We encourage the Administration to ensure that U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) have the resources they need to be able to expeditiously clear and process import and export cargo shipments, vessels, and crew. These resources will also help the agencies implement their contingency plans for dealing with CBP and USCG inspectors who have fallen ill from COVID-19.
- Workers at U.S. ports and marine terminals - specifically longshore and terminal personnel, service providers and vessel agents - must be treated as “essential workers” and given priority for personal protective equipment such as masks, gloves, cleaning supplies and hand sanitizer to ensure they can continue to safely work as localized infections occur. Such workers must continue to be excepted from blanket shelter-in-place orders issued by state or local governments.
- Finally, the safe and efficient operation of commercial ships requires that crewmembers that hold valid U.S. visas or are US citizens and are not sick are able to sign on or off the vessel or be afforded shore leave when the vessel is in a U.S. port. We encourage the Administration to continue its current policies that allow for crew changes and shore leave for visa-holding seafarers.

Thank you again for your work to address the COVID-19 outbreak and for your consideration of the above recommendations, which are intended to help keep America’s import and export commerce flowing smoothly. The companies that operate the international ocean transportation system remain committed to moving the goods that keep the U.S. economy functioning as we address this global challenge.

Sincerely,



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