



FEDERAL MARITIME COMMISSION

April 23, 2024

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing you not only as a Federal Maritime Commissioner, but as a longtime resident of the State of Maryland to commend you and your Administration for the rapid and comprehensive response to the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse.

The tragic loss of life and the temporary closing of the Port of Baltimore is the latest event in a string of supply chain disruptions that have taken place in recent years that include the COVID-19 pandemic, threats to shipping in the Red Sea, and reduced operations of the Panama Canal. Even though trade is international, that commerce is embedded in local communities. Companies located in cities and communities deep in the Heartland rely on the Port of Baltimore to gain access to overseas markets.

Workers in many parts of the United States will be affected by the temporary closure of the Port of Baltimore. I am particularly concerned that the anticipated recovery period for the Port of Baltimore will severely jeopardize both the skilled workforce that services the maritime trade and the auxiliary intermodal workforce that is dependent on port activity. The good news is there is precedent on how these people can be helped.

During the pandemic, Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, commonly referred to as the CARES Act. Section 4112 of that legislation authorized and provided funding to the U.S. Department of the Treasury to make payments to workforces devastated by the massive economic swings during the pandemic. In particular, passenger air carriers, cargo air carriers, and certain contractors benefitted from the continuation of payment of employee wages, salaries, and benefits this statute provided. Collectively and over the course of the pandemic, in excess of \$66 billion dollars was provided to the aviation industry between 2020 to 2022.

In the wake of the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse, there are local companies and workers suffering from an economic upheaval. The CARES Act can serve as a model for providing relief to impacted workers and industries.

The maritime industry never stopped working during the pandemic. While other service industries, such as aviation, were forced to stay home during the height of the pandemic, it was maritime and intermodal services that kept delivering what turned out to be record setting cargo volumes.

Now members of the maritime industry and community need relief. Thousands of employees in the Baltimore region are directly or indirectly reliant on the port for their livelihood. We should support them in their period of need to the same level as we did other transportation workers during the pandemic.

Mr. President, you are someone who has demonstrated a commitment throughout your career in public service to caring for the wellbeing and security of American workers. Identifying administrative or legislative ways to support workers and companies impacted by events at the Port of Baltimore can provide important and needed temporary assistance.

Sincerely,

Carl W. Bentzel
Commissioner

cc:

The Honorable Benjamin R. Cardin, U.S. Senate

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen, U.S. Senate

The Honorable C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger, Member, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable John Sarbanes, Member, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Kweisi Mfume, Member, U.S. House of Representatives