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| The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski, ChairwomanThe Honorable Richard C. Shelby, Vice ChairmanSenate Committee on AppropriationsS-128, U.S. CapitolWashington, D.C. 20510 |
| The Honorable Harold Rogers, ChairmanThe Honorable Nita M. Lowey, Ranking memberCommittee on Appropriations H-307 1016 Longworth House Office BuildingWashington, DC 20515 |
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Dear Chairwoman Mikulski, Vice Chairman Shelby, Chairman Rogers, and Ranking Member Lowey:

Thank you for your efforts to increase U.S. Army Corps of Engineers civil works program harbor maintenance funding in your annual Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies (E&W) Appropriations Acts.

The undersigned organizations urge that when you enter into negotiations to complete Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) annual appropriations legislation you support Harbor Maintenance Tax (HMT) work funded at a level that ‘Hits the HMT Target’ established in the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 (WRRDA 2014) section 2101(b)(1)(A). Additionally, we support allocating FY15 and future years HMT work consistent with WRRDA 2014’s allocation authorizations. WRRDA passed with very strong bipartisan support: 412-4 and 91-7 in the House and Senate respectively. In July the House ‘Hit the HMT Target’ in its E&W Appropriations bill through a floor amendment that passed by a 281-137 vote.

Enough HMT revenue is collected each year to meet the nation’s annual authorized harbor maintenance needs for harbors of all sizes. Unfortunately, harbors and navigation channels are getting narrower and shallower due to accumulating sediment, dredged material disposal area capacity is declining, and harbor structures such as breakwaters and jetties are deteriorating due to inadequate funding.

The Army Corps of Engineers has reported that nationwide authorized channel depths are available about half of the time, and then only over half of the channel’s width. This drives up the cost of U.S. exports and imports, which threatens U.S. economic growth and increases the risk of vessel groundings and associated oil spills. Many U.S. exports compete in a very price-sensitive global market where transportation inefficiencies mean losing business to other countries. Underutilization of HMT revenue threatens the continued operation of small and medium sized harbors, and some have closed due to inadequate maintenance.

Harbors and navigation channels are a vital part of our nation’s transportation infrastructure, and the elimination or reduction in their capacity can have significant impacts on local communities and economies. WRRDA 2014 recognizes both the national need to increase harbor maintenance spending and the local and regional economic impacts of harbors of different sizes and types of commerce.

Full use of HMT is urgently needed for safe and efficient freight transportation and is desired by navigation stakeholders. Congress, through WRRDA 2014, committed to achieve full use of HMT through incremental increases over a ten-year period, with FY15 being the first year. It is vitally important that this commitment be met.

While addressing increased funding is difficult, the United States should not miss opportunities to spur economic growth, improve our global competitiveness and create jobs. We urge you to craft a final FY15 E&W Appropriations bill (or title within an omnibus appropriations bill) that meets WRRDA 2014’s FY15 HMT spending target and allocation provisions to maintain the Nation’s shipping channels, gateways to the global marketplace.

Sincerely,