

August 29, 2017

Mr. Kevin K. McAleenan
Acting Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20229

Dear Commissioner McAleenan:

Congratulations on your nomination to be the next U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Commissioner. On behalf of the American Association of Port Authorities (AAPA), the recognized and coordinated voice of seaports in the Americas, we look forward to continuing a strong partnership with CBP to ensure that maritime facilities and their surrounding communities are secure and the nation's supply chain remains efficient and productive.

As you are aware, to maximize the security and efficiency of the nation's port system, CBP resources must be accessible and readily available at U.S. ports. There is an immediate need to focus on long overdue resources for maritime ports and to resolve the CBP staffing shortages to ensure the security of passenger and freight facilities, as well as the communities directly connected to these ports.

In FY 2015, CBP was funded to hire 2,000 staff, and fewer than 20 officers, or one percent, were assigned to seaports. This disproportionate approach to security and CBP staffing at maritime ports cannot continue. The nation's ports handled roughly 1.3 billion metric tons of foreign trade cargo in 2016, and more than 11 million maritime containers and over 11 million international passengers each year. Annual increases in volume and periodic surges in ship traffic have continually led to repeated dock-side delays in inspecting and clearing cargo. Ports continue to struggle with balancing a CBP staffing shortfall against security threats and business demands.

Every port region in the country has weighed in on this issue; from the North Pacific ports to the South Atlantic ports, the Great Lakes' ports to the Gulf ports, and the South Pacific ports to the North Atlantic ports. These regions and their ports have repeatedly contacted their regional CBP port directors, CBP headquarters and Members of Congress on the need for increased staffing resources and greater flexibility to help process the rising passenger and freight volumes.

To address these shortages, port authorities have utilized an array of tools to keep cargo and passengers moving through their terminals. The Reimbursable Services Program is a tool authorized by Congress that allows ports to pay the overtime costs of CBP personnel when additional hours of screening are requested. While this program enables CBP to support additional requests for services, it is not a long-term cost our ports can afford. The need for a permanent solution remains.

CBP is the frontline for the nation's freight network. AAPA recommends working together with you and Congress to find appropriate ways to address maritime CBP staffing shortages in the annual appropriations process through a continuing resolution, an omnibus bill or an infrastructure package.

The port industry recognizes the internal difficulties that CBP faces to bring on new CBP staff and assign them to maritime operations. AAPA commends the recent efforts to exempt polygraph testing in certain situations to hire new staff and shorten the timeframe it takes to bring new CBP staff onboard. Initiatives to streamline CBP's hiring process for veterans has received great reviews within some of the port regions. However, not all CBP regional port directors have embraced this policy initiative. AAPA encourages you to continue the policy of hiring veterans and assigning them to ports, but to also ensure that all CBP port directors fully embrace this initiative.

AAPA looks forward to working with you to successfully address CBP maritime challenges. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly if I can be of further assistance in providing additional information on the nation's port system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kurt J. Nagle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Kurt J. Nagle
President and CEO

CC: Elaine Duke; Acting Secretary, Department of Homeland Security