

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

July 1, 2016

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Johnson:

Thank you for your service and your dedication to protecting and securing our country. We recognize and support your Department's ongoing efforts to improve security and alleviate passenger wait-times in our nation's airports. However, as you are well aware, our nation's security is a multi-faceted challenge. As DHS addresses the ongoing challenges associated with aviation security, we ask that you also focus long overdue resources to our maritime ports and resolve the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) staffing shortages facing the passenger and freight facilities that connect directly with our communities.

In Fiscal Year 2015, when CBP was funded to hire 2,000 staff, fewer than 20 officers were assigned to seaports. We cannot let this disproportionate approach to security continue. Our nation's seaports handle more than 11 million maritime containers and over 11 million international passengers each year. Annual increases in volume and periodic surges in ship traffic, paired with a muted response from the Department, have led to repeated dock-side delays in inspecting and clearing cargo, creating a ripple effect throughout our economy and supply chain.

To address these shortages, port authorities have utilized an array of tools to keep cargo and passengers moving through their terminals. One such tool is the congressionally authorized pilot 559 program, which allows ports to pay the overtime costs of CBP personnel when additional hours of screening are required. While this flexibility was meant to serve as an avenue for relief, it is not a cost that our ports can afford to bear in the long-term. The need for a permanent solution remains.

Moreover, as Members of Congress we stand ready and willing to assist the Department in addressing CBP's current staffing issues. In April, the House unanimously approved legislation to help enhance the operational capacity of CBP services with the passage of the Border and Maritime Coordination Improvement Act, H.R. 3586. Language was also included in the Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to enable CBP to expedite the hiring process for applicants with a military background. These are important steps in the right direction; however, more must be done to ensure that the staffing shortages at our seaports are addressed.

We, therefore, urge you to take this opportunity to address CBP staffing issues at our nation's seaports, in addition to our air and land ports of entry.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Ted Poe
Member of Congress



J. Randy Forbes
Member of Congress



Janice Hahn
Member of Congress



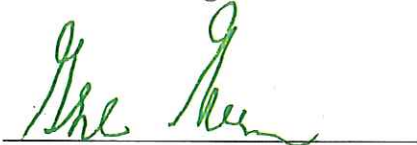
Kathy Castor
Member of Congress



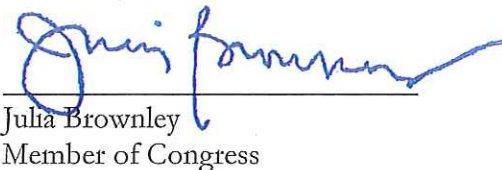
Grace Napolitano
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Corrine Brown
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Gene Green
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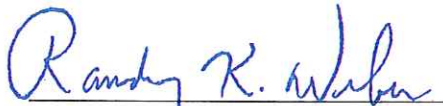
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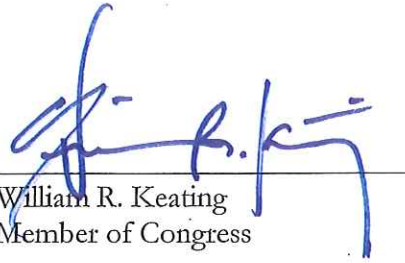
Derek Kilmer
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Stacey E. Plaskett
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Brian Babin
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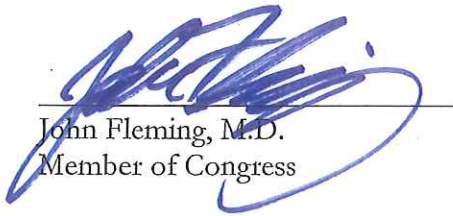
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John Fleming, M.D.
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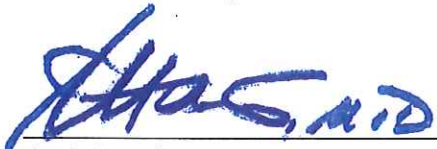
Scott Rigell
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Blake Farenthold
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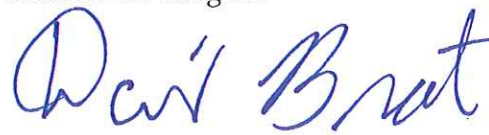
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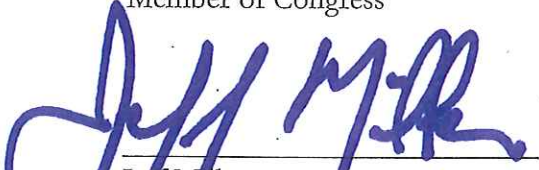

Bill Posey
Member of Congress

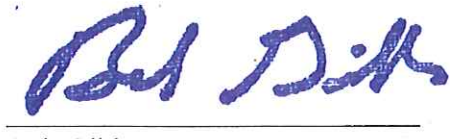

Patrick E. Murphy
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Bill Flores
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Jeff Miller
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Bob Gibbs
Member of Congress


Dave Reichert
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Paul Gosar
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John Culberson
Member of Congress

CC:

The Honorable John Carter, Chairman Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee

The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard, Ranking Member Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee

The Honorable John Hoeven Chairman Senate Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Appropriation Subcommittee on Homeland Security