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The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski, Chairwoman
The Honorable Richard C. Shelby, Vice Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein, Chairwoman
The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development
186 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski, Vice Chairman Shelby, Chairwoman Feinstein, and Ranking Member Alexander:

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.

We write to request that when you enter into negotiations with your House counterparts to complete Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) annual appropriations legislation you support a final FY15 harbor maintenance funding level that meets the section 2101(b)(1)(A) of Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA) of 2014 (WRRDA 2014) target for that year, which has strong support in the Senate. Additionally, we support allocating FY15 harbor maintenance funding consistent with WRRDA 2014's allocation authorizations. The Senate supported the WRRDA 2014 conference report by a 91-7 vote.

Enough Harbor Maintenance Tax (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 the commitment be met.

We urge you to work with the House to craft a final FY15 E&W Appropriations bill (or title within an omnibus appropriations bill) that meets WRRDA 2014's FY15 harbor maintenance spending target and allocation provisions.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.