

TESTIMONY OF WILLIAM P. DOYLE
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS AND DEPUTY GENERAL COUNCIL
MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION

HEARING ON CHALLENGES FACING THE COAST GUARD'S MARINE SAFETY PROGRAM

Thank you Chairman Cummings, Ranking Member Latourette and the rest of the Committee for allowing me to speak to you today. The challenges facing the Coast Guard's Marine Safety program represent challenges for the entire maritime industry, both labor and management. This hearing is a good step towards overcoming them.

My name is William Doyle, and I am the Director of Government Affairs and Deputy General Counsel of the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association, and a Coast Guard Licensed marine officer. For 132 years, MEBA has represented Coast Guard licensed deck and engineering officers serving in all aspects of the United States Merchant Marine. We have long been partnered with the Coast Guard in ensuring

the safe and secure movement of waterborne commerce throughout our country and the world.

The Coast Guard is one of the most effective agencies of the Federal Government. Its search and rescue programs, law enforcement efforts in the war on drugs, patrols of our maritime borders, response to domestic natural disasters like Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and support of our military around the globe demonstrate their professionalism and their excellence.

The Coast Guard has earned its reputation by accepting mission after mission, even when they aren't given additional resources. Their record of achieving much with little is commendable. However, the constant addition of new missions has resulted in less public attention for the Coast Guard's core missions like Marine Safety. This has made solving the challenges that we currently face within the Marine Safety program all the more difficult. I am confident, however, that through the public-private partnership model that we in maritime have successfully

implemented since the founding days of our Republic, we can work to solve these challenges together.

The issues that we face in the Marine Safety program are both internal, structural challenges that arise out of the Coast Guard's founding as a military organization, and external challenges that arise out of the needs to balance safety and security with maintaining the steady flow of commerce.

The Coast Guard is fundamentally military. Yet they also are responsible for the majority of the safety and security related regulatory functions in regards to the merchant marine. This is the only branch of the Armed Forces that has such a role. As such, there are situations where the adoption of military style systems has not been effective. For example, the current tour-of-duty system does not allow a sufficient amount of time for uniformed personnel to learn their way around a commercial vessel's engine room before they move to a new assignment.

Further, the Coast Guard's law enforcement function often complicates their regulatory function and creates an adversarial relationship where one does not need to exist. Vessel inspection teams often seem more like police than inspectors.

We feel that an increased number of civilian employees in areas such as safety inspections, merchant mariner credentialing and investigatory positions would ensure the needed consistency and level of experience to overcome the challenges in this area. MEBA and the rest of maritime labor have access to a pool of retired, but still working-age, mariners who could easily fill such positions.

Consistency is another challenge that must be addressed. Our companies make many decisions – including decisions regarding hiring, flagging of vessels, construction of vessels, wages and benefits – based on the Coast Guard's interpretation of and rulings on various regulatory questions. Any decision made by the Coast Guard has a wide impact on the

maritime industry, and it is critical that the Coast Guard be fair and consistent in their interpretation and regulatory opinions.

The external challenges that are present in the marine safety program are fundamental and far reaching. The prime ongoing challenge is balancing safety and security with ensuring the flow of commerce. Quite often, in their zeal to make the U.S.-Flag and the U.S. maritime industry the world's safest and most secure, they make it extremely difficult for the industry to compete internationally. While the United States is a large part of the global maritime community and has been a member of the International Maritime Organization since 1950, you quite often find U.S. Coast Guard standards that are much higher than those adopted by IMO and in use throughout the rest of the world. By holding ourselves to a higher standard than the rest of the world, we are handicapped when competing internationally.

This issue is highlighted most clearly in the debate over the Transportation Worker Identification Credential. The TWIC was

designed to increase security in our ports. Yet the TWIC only applies to American Mariners, who move less than 2% of the cargo entering and leaving U.S. ports. Further, the card is not compatible with the international standards for seafarers' identity documents established by the International Labor Organization. We are concerned that TWIC will become just another example of overregulation without any increase in security.

This is just a small sampling of the challenges we face. These issues are not new. They have been issues for decades. They do not have easy answers. I am confident, however, that working together we can find common-sense solutions to them. MEBA is ready and willing to assist both Congress and the Coast Guard in any way we can.

Thank you, and I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.