

Mr. James C. McCurry, Jr.
Chief Administrative Officer
Georgia Ports Authority

**Georgia Ports Authority Testimony to the United States House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources Legislative Hearing on H.R. 6841, H.R. 7925, H.R.
8704 & H.R. 8705 on June 27, 2024**

Thank you, Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Grijalva, Subcommittee Chairman Bentz, and Subcommittee Ranking Member Huffman, for inviting me to testify today. As the Chief Administrative Officer of the Georgia Ports Authority, I oversee Contracts, Properties & Planning, Purchasing, Grants Administration, Risk Management & Sustainability, Navigation Programs, Governmental Affairs, and all legal matters for the Authority. With 22 years of experience in the maritime industry and a Master of Science degree in Transportation Management from the University of Denver, I have witnessed firsthand the critical role our ports play in both local and national economies. Today, I am here to support HR 8704, a bill introduced by Congressman Buddy Carter, which seeks to balance environmental protection with economic stability and operational safety.

The Georgia Ports Authority, a public state entity, is dedicated to providing customers with the most efficient and productive port facilities in the nation and to creating jobs and business opportunities for our nation's benefit. Our ports serve as magnets for international trade and investment, supporting critical sectors of our economy such as agriculture, manufacturing, and retail. We are committed to maintaining a competitive edge through the development of leading-edge technology, marketing, and operations to move cargo faster. The Authority is also working hard to identify what must be done today to sustain growth, performance, and security for tomorrow.

Georgia's deepwater ports in Savannah and Brunswick, together with inland terminals in Murray County and Bainbridge, are gateways to the world for American commerce. They are the critical conduits through which raw materials and finished products flow to and from destinations around the globe.

As one of the state's largest public employers, the GPA directly employs almost 1,800 trained logistics professionals. GPA operations, together with private sector port-related operations, account for more than 609,000 jobs statewide, \$171 billion dollars in revenue, and generate over \$10 billion in federal revenues annually in Georgia alone.

The proposed amendments to the North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Strike Reduction Rule pose a significant threat to our operations. These changes would lead to extensive delays for pilotage services, with Savannah experiencing delays up to 28 days and Brunswick up to 9 days, resulting in substantial economic losses. Our study indicates potential job losses of up to 26,820 jobs and a \$1.85 billion reduction in GDP. The repercussions would be felt nationwide, disrupting supply chains and increasing costs for consumers.

State-licensed pilots face significant challenges due to these speed restrictions. Reduced speeds compromise their ability to navigate safely, particularly in adverse weather conditions. For instance, during high wind days, the slower speeds required by the rule would make it nearly impossible for pilots to safely guide ships, leading to increased risks of accidents and port closures. These operational challenges not only threaten safety but also contribute to significant congestion and delays, further straining an already overburdened supply chain.

While the intention behind the rule is to protect the North Atlantic Right Whale, the unintended consequence could be a dramatic increase in greenhouse gas emissions. Ships idling at sea and rerouted cargo would contribute to emissions three times higher than those from the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach combined in 2020. This is an environmental cost we cannot afford.

The financial burden on our pilots and the Georgia Ports Authority is substantial. Compliance costs, including the need for new pilot boats and additional crew, are estimated to exceed \$3.1 million. Furthermore, increased legal liabilities for pilots could lead to more conservative operations, exacerbating delays and congestion.

In conclusion, while we support the protection of the North Atlantic Right Whale, it is crucial to find a balanced approach that safeguards our economy and operational safety. HR 8704 offers a pathway to achieve this balance. I urge the committee to support this bill and work with all stakeholders to develop a solution that protects both our environment and our economic interests. By doing so, we can ensure the continued prosperity of Georgia's ports and the broader economy they support.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your questions.