

**STATEMENT OF THE
AMERICAN MARITIME OFFICERS
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF MASTERS, MATES & PILOTS
MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION
and the
SEAFARERS INTERNATIONAL UNION
on the
HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN PUERTO RICO AND THE JONES ACT
SEPTEMBER 28, 2017**

The men and women of the United States Merchant Marine stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico, and our members who live and work here. Between our organizations and our affiliates, we represent the mariners employed on all of the vessels operated by the various Jones Act shipping lines that currently service Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

We are committed to working with our operators, with the Maritime Administration, Departments of Transportation, Homeland Security and Defense, FEMA, and the many, many others who are working right now to bring critical supplies, food, medicine, water and fuel to those in need in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

Despite the misinformation that has been spreading like a disease throughout social media and the network news, maritime labor knows – from first-hand experience – the critical role that the Jones Act plays in keeping America safe, ensuring our economic, homeland and national security, and securing good middle class jobs for Americans in every state in the union, as well as our overseas territories like Puerto Rico. There is too much fake news going around about the Jones Act right now, and it's critical that those of us who are involved in this trade work to get good information into the hands of the American people. That's why we are here today.

Our members have been servicing Puerto Rico for more than half a century. Each of our unions has a presence in Puerto Rico, and two of our unions have facilities in Puerto Rico. Between the four of us, our unions represent hundreds of Puerto Ricans and their families, and the Seafarers International Union represents over 2600 men and women in the Virgin Islands alone. We are committed to doing our part to help Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands recover because these are our friends, our families and our fellow citizens who are suffering, and the United States Merchant Marine has braved countless hazards, from hurricanes to hostile warships, to deliver the goods for our troops and for our fellow citizens whenever and wherever needed.

Make no mistake: maritime labor has never, not once, opposed a waiver of the Jones Act in an emergency when there were not enough ships or mariners to handle the job. We have never let a ship sail shorthanded.

We are very concerned that a long-term waiver of a year or more, would have severe and drastic consequences not only for Puerto Rico, but for the United States as a whole. The Jones Act ensures a domestic seafarer and shipbuilding base in peace time

so that mariners and workers, all of whom are critical to national security, are available and ready to go if needed to war time. Any long-term waiver of the Jones Act would undermine the entire purpose of the law and could jeopardize the future existence of the Merchant Marine.

To be clear – the Jones Act is not impeding relief efforts in Puerto Rico right now. It is not forcing aid to be turned away, nor is it slowing down efforts to get relief supplies to the people who need them. Foreign flag ships with cargo from ports outside the United States are, and remain, allowed entry to Puerto Rico. We urge Congress to exercise due diligence in fact finding, and beware of misinformation and false claims being propagated by anti-Jones Act agitators who are attempting to hijack this crisis to further their agendas. We also ask that a full accounting be made at the end of the temporary waiver the President granted this morning so we can know what the impact of this waiver was on relief efforts and so that we can better prepare for future crises. Finally, we ask that Congress continue to stand with us in bipartisan support of the Jones Act, which remains the foundational law of the domestic maritime industry, which has its origins as far back as the founding of our Republic.

Maritime labor, alongside our colleagues, remain committed to doing everything in our power to help our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands through the aftermath of these devastating storms.