



Marine Engineers'
Beneficial Association, AFL-CIO
444 Capitol Street, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20001



International Organization of
Masters, Mates & Pilots, AFL-CIO
700 Maritime Blvd., Suite B
Linthicum Heights, MD 21090

May 7, 2021

The Honorable Robert Menedez, Chairman
Committee on Foreign Relations
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
Fax: 202-224-0836

The Honorable Tim Kaine, Chairman
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,
Transnational Crime, Civilian Security,
Democracy, Human Rights and Global Women's
Issues, Committee on Foreign Relations
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Committee and Subcommittee Chairmen:

We are writing to bring to your attention a crisis that is developing in Panama that has the potential to impact international trade to an extent similar to that which recently occurred due to the grounding of the *M/V Ever Given* in the Suez Canal.

At this time, Panama Canal workers are required to work under increasingly hazardous conditions, their civil rights are being jeopardized and their rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining are being denied. Police have violently suppressed peaceful protesters on Thursday, April 29, 2021. Protesting resumed with police outnumbering protesters on May 6, 2021. Panama Canal workers, including tugboat captains, marine engineers, deckhands, shoreside line-handlers and maintenance workers are calling for safer working conditions. Working conditions have deteriorated dramatically with the advent of the new Panama Canal, the COVID-19 pandemic and the refusal of the Panama Canal Authority (ACP) to meaningfully address these issues.

Unsafe ship-handling procedures implemented in the Canal locks, inadequate ship assist tugs, and a depleted and fatigued workforce are positioning massive LNG vessels any one of which has the potential to make the recent Suez Canal blockage appear inconsequential.

We, the undersigned labor organizations, urge you to demand that corrective action be taken by the Republic of Panama. The Panama Canal is not only an essential artery of international trade, it is a showpiece of the Western Hemisphere. Panama Canal workers must have a safe work place. Their human rights must be respected.

Respectfully,

Don Marcus, President
IOMMP
dmarcus@bridgedeck.com

Adam Vokac, President
M.E.B.A
avokac@mebaunion.org

Cc: The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Chair, Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
Honorable Gary Peters, Chairman, Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, Maritime
Freight and Ports.