

Seaport Security

Federal Policy

Background:

Our nation's seaports are international borders and gateways to Florida and beyond. The federal government and the state of Florida have spent millions to protect these gateways and prevent the introduction of harmful materials into the United States. Florida seaports continue to work cooperatively with federal partners within the Department of Homeland Security – U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Customs and Border Protection – to ensure the protection of our nation against potential grave danger.

Current Issue:

Florida is the cruise capital of the world and a leading port of entry for international cargo. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents are on the front line when cruise passengers and cargo enter our country. Not only is CBP short 500 officers in the U.S. maritime environment, but their current staffing level is inadequate to meet increased passenger and cargo flows.

The Conference Committee Explanatory Report on the 2019 omnibus appropriations bill strongly encourages CBP to work with seaports and associated stakeholders to improve clearance operations at cargo and passenger seaports. The Committee also noted that scanning equipment at maritime ports is reaching its expected normal performance life and that CBP should provide as much information about equipment replacement events as practicable. In addition, the explanatory language stated CBP's requirements for space in new facilities can add significant costs to projects, and the Committee directed CBP to engage thoughtfully with ports when negotiating agreements with port owners and operators.

Recommendations:

The Florida Ports Council **supports an increase in CBP funding and staffing resources specifically directed to maritime activities at seaports of entry. Congress should also request a staffing plan from CBP concerning maritime agents.**

The Florida Ports Council commends the Conference Committee for the inclusion of directory language with the 2019 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, and recommends that **Congress continue to hold hearings on CBP clearance operations, scanning equipment installment and replacement activities, and facility requirements.**

The Council also appreciates the assistance and activities of the CBP to work with all stakeholders in Florida on seaport issues. We recommend that **CBP continue to hold meetings (either with individual seaports or a gathering of multiple seaports) to discuss the issues raised in the Conference Committee Explanatory Report.**