

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 28, 2025

The Honorable Russell Vought
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20528

Admiral Kevin Lunday
Acting Commandant
United States Coast Guard
2703 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20593

Dear Director Vought, Secretary Noem, and Admiral Lunday:

As the Trump administration finalizes its Budget of the United States Government for fiscal year 2026, we request prioritizing the United States Coast Guard's recruitment and retention initiatives by providing an effective funding level that preserves progress and enhances future efforts despite ongoing staggering workforce shortages and the forthcoming rise in vessel traffic, particularly on the Great Lakes during the busy summer season.

Of the Coast Guard's 46,000 active-duty and reserve personnel, the Service is 3,000 members short of its targeted enlisted capacity. In 2023, because of this personnel shortage, the Coast Guard experienced unpredictable interruptions in vital operations involving essential search and rescue and law enforcement missions. In 2024, the service was forced to make temporary, undesirable nation-wide changes to its operational posture to prevent the continued decline of its operational capacity and to ensure the safety and security of our constituents in the maritime domain.

Unfortunately, personnel constraints resulting from inadequate funding of recruitment and retention initiatives are expected to force the Coast Guard to once again diminish its operational footprint in summer 2025. Across the Great Lakes, 29 units located in Michigan (13), Ohio (5), Wisconsin (4), Illinois (3), New York (2), Indiana (1) and Minnesota (1) have been temporarily closed, have billets unfilled or have transitioned to "scheduled only" operations. Weakened redundancy in operational assets forces the Coast Guard to operate with a single point of failure vulnerability across missions, including ensuring the safety of vessel traffic, the free flow of commerce and the security of our maritime borders. This status quo is unacceptable.

The Coast Guard's prioritization of recruiting efforts is beginning to yield positive results. Fiscal year 2024 marked the first year since 2017 in which the Coast Guard *exceeded* its recruiting targets across enlisted, officer, reserve and active-duty components. It is critical that Congress

build on this momentum by empowering the Coast Guard to further enhance recruiting initiatives to continue shrinking the enlisted workforce gap through new accessions until the operational restrictions under the Force Alignment Initiative may be reversed.

The Coast Guard plays a critical role in the safety and security of vessels on the Great Lakes. Historically, numerous small boat stations and aids to navigation teams across the Great Lakes have been staffed to full capacity during heightened boating seasons to respond directly to search and rescue and law enforcement missions.

The Coast Guard should seek to return to such a posture by requesting Congress provide prioritized and dedicated recruiting and retention funding that would support additional recruiting personnel and offices to improve recruiter-to-recruit ratios and expand the Service's recruiting footprint. New recruiting locations would increase the output of qualified members at accession points and provide closer alignment with the DoD recruiting footprint. Enhanced funding is also urgently needed to enable the Coast Guard to accelerate exigent efforts to efficiently hire new talent and strengthen its workforce to fill current operational gaps emerging this year.

We thank you in advance for your consideration of our request and hope the Coast Guard will ask Congress to provide effective recruitment and retention funding levels for fiscal year 2026 that will empower the Service to continue its progress reducing personnel shortfalls and strengthen future efforts by expanding the Coast Guard recruiting capabilities and capacity.

Sincerely,


Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator


Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator


Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator


Tina Smith
United States Senator


Gary C. Peters
United States Senator