

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 14, 2020

Matthew W. Sibley, Rear Admiral  
U.S. Coast Guard  
Assistant Commandant for Capability

RE: Oppose USCG-2020-0042

Dear Admiral Sibley,

We write in opposition to UCG-2020-0042, titled, "Consolidation of Redundant Coast Guard Boat Stations," which proposes to close U.S. Coast Guard Station Oxford, located in the city of Oxford, Maryland. Station Oxford is the only U.S. Coast Guard site in the Eastern Shore of Maryland, a region that consists of nine counties and makes up more than a third of the total land area of the State. We fear that the loss of the facility in Oxford would drastically increase emergency response times with the effect of undermining the region's safety and security.

The Eastern Shore is a vast geographic region that includes the waterways of the Chesapeake Bay, Choptank River, and Little Choptank River. Economically, the area and its waterways form one of the most critical seafood harvesting grounds in the state. In its large geographic jurisdiction are the active Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant as well as the Cove Point Liquefied Natural Gas export facility, two key national security assets. Moreover, these waters are part of the Intracoastal Waterway that vessels use for transit along the length of the East Coast of the continental United States. Thousands of watermen work and travel along the waterways, even in cold water and inclement weather. The individuals who work in this and other industries on the water will at times require assistance in a time of emergency.

Station Oxford is all the more essential for meeting the unique security and safety needs of the Eastern Shore given that it is the only U.S. Coast Guard facility in this extensive region. Manned by approximately 20 U.S. Coast Guard personnel, Station Oxford provides critical emergency response in a timely manner that is not likely to be maintained if it were to close. Indeed, many of the public safety agencies in the area simply do not have the boats and other resources necessary for responding to emergencies on the waterways. There is no alternative facility that can meet the needs of the Eastern Shore. Station Annapolis, which in the case of Station Oxford closing, would become the closest facility. Occupying a more northerly geographic position, that facility would not be able to respond to more southerly areas in the same amount of time.

Two other government agencies share the site with the U.S. Coast Guard: (1) the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Centers for Coastal Ocean Service's (NCCOS) Cooperative Oxford Laboratory and (2) Maryland's Department of Natural Resources (DNR). This cohabitation of three agencies on one site has created longstanding partnerships while also allowing for greater utilization of the unique resources of the U.S. Coast Guard by state and local entities. Yet while both NOAA and DNR also provide important functions, they cannot be a substitute for Station Oxford, whose public servants stand ready to respond to

emergencies 24/7 all year round. Their commitment to serving the needs of the Eastern Shore was only underscored when, during the 35-day federal government shutdown of 2018-2019, the men and women of Station Oxford continued to work even as they went unpaid and the NOAA and DNR facilities were vacant.

We thank you for taking the time to consider our public comment and hope that you can recognize the merits of our argument. Station Oxford is a critical resource that can help save lives in the Eastern Shore. It should remain in operation.

Sincerely,

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

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Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

/s/ Andy Harris

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Andy Harris, M.D.  
House of Representatives

