

## **Appropriations Full Committee Member Day Hearing**

### **Testimony from Congressman Thomas R. Suozzi**

**Wednesday, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Granger, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of funding for three capital improvement projects. 1) \$70 million for the United States Merchant Marine Academy, 2) \$4 million for the Northwell Health Geriatric Center of Excellence, and 3) \$300,000 for shellfish seeding on the North Shore of Long Island.

First, as the acting Chair of the Board of Visitors (BOV) at the United States Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, in my district on Long Island, I respectfully request \$70 million dollars for the Academy's long-ignored and now woefully inadequate infrastructure.

Everyone agrees that the Merchant Marine Academy, one of our five service academies, which trains our nation's mariners and is vital to our nation's defense, has embarrassing facility deficiencies. The new head of MARAD, Acting Administrator Lucinda Lessley, the Department of Transportation, the National Academy of Public Administration, the Parents and Alumni Association, and the Academy's leadership itself all agree that the facilities, many of which are 80 years old, are decaying and its buildings, its electric grid, its information technology systems (and lack thereof) are thwarting the institution's recruiting capabilities and its mission to properly train the next generation of our nation's mariners.

Compared to the other service academies the Merchant Marine Academy's infrastructure is woefully subpar. Decades of neglect and bureaucracy have left the United States Merchant Marine Academy and orphan. I would like to submit for the record an eight-year infrastructure plan created by a group of experts and alumni who were so concerned about the Academy's declining physical condition that they formed the "USMMA Maritime Security Infrastructure Council."

The Academy and BOV are committed to restoring the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy to its proper place in the pantheon of service academies, however the Academy cannot wait to get started without your help. That is why I have respectfully requested an initial investment of \$70 million in infrastructure funding, \$25 million of which I hope will be used for design and engineering costs and \$45 million of which I hope will go towards shovel-ready projects.

The Academy needs this meaningful initial monetary investment to modernize its academic and training environments, including technology, information science, collaborative learning, and physical readiness to bring them up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century standards.

Second, I respectfully request \$4 million dollars for the Northwell Health Geriatric Center of Excellence, my highest priority for a Community Funding Project. Our goal is to create a national model for senior citizen healthcare.

Growing up all four of my grandparents lived in our home. Three of them were very sick. We all took care of them but my mother, a former operating room nurse at Glen Cove Hospital in my hometown, provided the bulk of the care. Over the past few years, my mom and dad passed away. They were 95 and 93 years old.

As the Committee is well aware, we have a storm coming in this country. 10,000 Americans are turning 65 every day, and the number of Americans over 65 will almost double by 2050. Our current health system does not properly account for the growing number of seniors and their special needs dealing with the complexities of healthcare.

That is why it is so important to standardize and implement best practices for elder care. The Northwell Health Geriatric Center of Excellence, located at Glen Cove Hospital, would serve as a hub of education and research as well as advocacy for older adults.

I am so excited about this project not just because of the benefit it would provide to my constituents, but because of how it could be replicated throughout the country and become a model of Geriatric Centers of Excellence throughout the nation.

Third, as the Co-Chair of the Long Island Sound Caucus, I respectfully request \$300,000 for my Community Funding Project to seed the North Shore of Long Island with shellfish.

This project would help restore shellfish populations and reduce nitrogen, bacteria, and harmful algal blooms in our bays and harbors.

Un-sewered homes and businesses and stormwater runoff, increases nitrogen loading and the potential for algae growth. When these algae blooms die off, their decomposition uses up oxygen in the water, causing hypoxia and threatening many species. Fortunately, with a large enough population, shellfish are able to control this excess nitrogen as they are filter feeders. A single adult oyster can filter 50 gallons of seawater each day. This project aims to restore and enhance our valuable waterways under threat due to nitrogen runoff by seeding our harbors with shellfish.

Water quality is critical to local economies, especially in coastal regions like Long Island. They not only provide employment opportunities (such as commercial fishing, shellfishing, bait shops, marinas, water-side restaurants, sailing schools, and sporting goods stores) but recreational opportunities that are critical to our way of life (such as swimming, boating, kayaking, fishing, and recreational shellfishing). They also improve property values and spur new business opportunities.

This project will help protect our “national treasure” the Long Island Sound, which we consider to be our national park.

Thank you for your consideration for these issues critical to communities in my district. I look forward to working with you on these projects. Thank you.