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April 14, 2021

The Hon. Frank Pallone, Jr.  
The Honorable Cathy McMorris  
United States House of Representatives  
Energy and Commerce Committee  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member McMorris,

Understanding that you will be holding hearings this week regarding Environmental Justice initiatives, including testimony from Dr. Mildred McClain with the Harambee House in Savannah, Georgia, I thought you may be interested in some of the efforts that the Georgia Ports Authority (GPA) has been engaged with in that regard.

Perhaps the most significant effort we have been directly involved with has been the *Savannah Community-Port Collaboration Project*. For this, the Harambee House was selected in 2016 to receive EPA technical assistance and pilot a draft Community-Port Collaboration Toolkit. This pilot project was one of four pilots that were collectively known as the Near-Port Community Capacity Building Project. Harambee House applied to participate in the pilot program to strengthen collaboration between near-port communities, Georgia Ports Authority (GPA) and other Port of Savannah terminal operator/owners. Following the selection of this project and beginning in 2017, the EPA convened the first of a series of in-person Needs Assessment meetings involving GPA, community leaders and the City of Savannah. The Needs Assessment included the following: boat and bus tours of the Port of Savannah and GPA terminal facilities; tours of the near-port communities; and sharing of experiences and views on the status of their working relationships.

Subsequently, in May 2017, the EPA enlisted a technical assistance provider to convene a series of in-person Needs Assessment meetings with stakeholders. This process included facilitated discussions with GPA senior staff, Hudson Hill, West Savannah, and Woodville Neighborhood leaders (community leaders) and City of Savannah elected officials and staff. The Needs Assessment also included a narrated boat tour of the Port of Savannah, a bus tour of GPA's terminal facilities and a community tour of near-port neighborhoods. Participants shared their experiences and discussed their views on the status of their working relationships. They also completed self-assessments and discussed their goals for the pilot. Based on this input, the technical assistance provider created a collaboration plan with shared goals and

outcomes to guide the pilot process. The plan outlined three site visits with in-person training and facilitated meetings aimed at creating a shared action plan to improve air quality for Savannah's near-port communities.

The in-person collaboration process included the following trainings:

- Port Operations 101: to help community leaders better understand how the Port of Savannah and GPA operate, who to contact with questions and concerns, and what role GPA plays within the Port of Savannah.
- Effective Community Engagement: to help Port facility owners/operators learn the history of environmental injustice and Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice, understand common environmental justice concerns, discuss implications of persistent inequities, and explore tools to engage communities effectively and include their input in decision-making.
- Leadership Skills-building: to help community leaders develop powerful elevator speeches to utilize when networking or in dialogue with other stakeholders, explore collaborative problem-solving approaches to resolve differences of opinion, examine air quality data and enhance community collaboration needed to design an air quality monitoring protocol. The series of facilitated meetings focused on the community leaders' goals to improve air quality in near port neighborhoods and build relationships between community leaders and implementation partners who could contribute to action plan development.

Outcomes of this training included:

- Increased awareness of air quality-related health risks and truck and rail traffic health and safety concerns,
- Shared understanding about past air quality levels, current air quality trends and opportunities for continued improvement,
- Increased community understanding of technical and scientific information related to Port activities,
- Development of an environmental/public health working group of residents,
- The Air Quality Improvement Action Plan for Savannah's Near-Port Communities, which addresses community concerns through tangible action steps,
- Increased trust and expanded partnerships between community leaders, the City of Savannah, GPA and port-related, industry and agency partners,
- And additional Lessons Learned, including:
  - Renew relationships and build intentional partnerships,
  - Be flexible and persistent with unexpected challenges,
  - Understand local environmental justice history,
  - Provide accurate information on existing conditions and empower community leaders to gather data,
  - Address participation barriers for community leaders; and
  - Invest in expanding partnerships that align actions with community-defined needs and goals.

In addition to the *Savannah Community-Port Collaboration Project*, the GPA is proud to have taken steps to constantly modernize our facilities in order to provide for the efficient flow of international trade for

our nation. In doing so, we have expanded gate facilities to reduce congestion and emissions from idling vehicles. We have a fully electric fleet of ship-to-shore cranes. All cranes serving our new Mega Rail facility, the largest on-dock intermodal facility in the United States and partially funded by a USDOT FASTLANE Grant, are fully electric gantry cranes. Further our rail expansion efforts, including inland rail hubs, has eliminated hundreds of thousands of truck miles and provided greater access to trade for communities throughout the Southeast and U.S. heartland.

The GPA has further partnered with the EPA, the Harambe House and other local community groups on initiatives:

- multiple EPA Diesel Emission Reduction Act grants totaling more than \$9 million to replaces older, high-emission trucks with newer, cleaner alternatives
- supported the Environmental Careers Program of the Harambe House
- donated to the community garden of Hudson Hill community
- donated equipment and tools over multiple years to the students of Harambe House Environmental Careers Worker Training Program
- hosted and invited the Harambe House and other neighborhood organizations to attend Job fair opportunities

It has been our pleasure to work with multiple organizations in and around our communities to support improved quality of life and economic opportunities for current and future generations. The Georgia Ports Authority looks forward to continuing these ongoing efforts.

Respectfully Submitted,



James C. McCurry, Jr.

CC: The Honorable Buddy Carter (GA-01)