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Brian W. Vahey
Vice President – Atlantic Region

February 17, 2026

Commander Timothy Bonner
Coast Guard Sector New York
Waterways Management Division
212 Coast Guard Dr.
Staten Island, NY 10305

Re: Special Local Regulation,
Temporary Anchorage Ground
Suspension, and Security Zones:
Sail 4th 250, International Naval
Review 250; Port of New York
and New Jersey (USCG-2025-
0903)

Dear Commander Bonner:

The American Waterways Operators (AWO) is the tugboat, towboat, and barge industry's advocate, resource, and united voice for safe, sustainable, and efficient transportation on America's waterways, oceans, and coasts. As the largest segment of the nation's 40,000-vessel domestic maritime fleet, our industry safely and efficiently moves 665 million tons of cargo each year and enables the flow of goods through ports on the inland and intracoastal waterways; the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coasts; and the Great Lakes.

AWO appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Coast Guard's proposal to establish temporary special local regulations and multiple security zones, and to temporarily suspend certain anchorage grounds in New York Harbor, Sandy Hook Bay, and the Hudson River before, during, and after Sail 4th 250 events, the U.S. Navy's International Naval Review 250 and International Aerial Review, Independence Day fireworks displays, and U.S. Navy Fleet Week events to be held between July 1, 2026 and July 9, 2026 (USCG-2025-0903).

The tugboat, towboat and barge industry plays a key role in ensuring safety, security, and operational efficiency within the marine transportation system. We appreciate the Coast Guard's engagement with local stakeholders in planning for this important event, and we understand that conversations with the Towboat and Harbor Carriers Association Port of NY/NJ, the Maritime Association for the Port of NY/NJ, the pilots, and other organizations are ongoing. We wish to emphasize certain safety, security, and logistical concerns raised during these discussions that warrant further emphasis.

Given the involvement of multiple federal, state, and local government entities in these events, it is important that the Coast Guard clearly identify how security operations will be organized and which agency will serve as the lead. We recommend that the Coast Guard take the lead on all issues impacting the maritime domain. When that is not feasible given legal jurisdictions and other factors, we urge the Coast Guard to proactively work with industry and government partners to facilitate communication between all parties. To that end, publishing a clear organizational chart with relevant points of contact would significantly enhance situational awareness across the maritime industry.

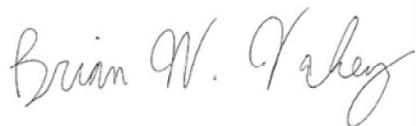
There are, however, three areas in which Coast Guard authority plays a critical role—one where the Coast Guard has already taken constructive action, and two where additional clarity and enforcement will be essential. First, we appreciate the Coast Guard's decision to allow mooring buoys to remain in place throughout the event. This will avoid the significant costs, operational downtime, and logistical challenges that would result from removing and reinstalling moorings or relocating barges, particularly given the limited alternative berthing options available in the harbor.

Second, to ensure the safety and security of commercial vessel operations during these events, it is imperative for the Coast Guard to enforce existing anchorage speed restrictions and prohibitions on tying up to mooring buoys or accessing barges. We urge the Coast Guard to explicitly incorporate these requirements into the spectator vessel application process. Additionally, each anchorage area designated as a spectator area should be evaluated for capacity to ensure that spectator vessels do not create hazardous conditions or interfere with essential commercial traffic.

Third, we seek clarification on the Coast Guard's plan to identify and escort vessels carrying essential cargoes—including waste and sewage—to ensure these operations can continue safely and without disruption.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Docket No. USCG-2025-0903. We would be pleased to provide any additional information and participate in further discussions. We would also welcome the opportunity to coordinate a virtual meeting between the Coast Guard and local towing vessel operators to address our questions and concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian W. Vahey".

Brian Vahey
Vice President – Atlantic Region