

Statement of Laura DiBella
Nominee, U.S. Federal Maritime Commission
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
October 22, 2025

Chair Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, and members of the Committee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to appear here before you today as a nominee to be Commissioner of the Federal Maritime Commission (FMC).

A sincere thank you as well as for the courtesies that your staff extended to me throughout the nomination process. I would like to recognize FMC Commissioners, Dye, Maffei, and Vekich and thank them for being here in supportive attendance. And most importantly, I would like to thank President Trump for nominating me for this most important role.

It is with great pleasure, humility, and honor to be nominated for this position as well as a homecoming of sorts to the maritime industry for me. In 2017, while spearheading local economic development in Nassau County, Florida, I was approached to wear a second hat and stand in temporarily as Port Director at the Port of Fernandina, Ocean Highway and Port Authority of Nassau County, a small and often overlooked seaport surrounded by renown juggernauts named JAXPORT, Port of Brunswick, and Port of Savannah. The port was going through a rough transition with its sole terminal operator and had little resources to spare for a qualified Port Director. I knew very little about ports back then, except for the fact that they were vital economic engines to a region and state, and because of that, and without hesitation and compensation, I willingly took on the role.

Little did I know at the time that the decision to support the port was one that would change the trajectory of my life and career forever. What began as a temporary assignment resulted in a two-and-a-half-year journey that put me at ground zero of seaport operations, port authority governance, and the integration of a port within the economic development space and overall supply chain network. The knowledge I gained while serving dual roles greatly enhanced my economic development capabilities and afforded me the opportunity to form lasting relationships with past and present members of the maritime administration team and that of the maritime community at large.

In the fall of 2019, I was approached about the Executive Director role for the Florida Harbor Pilots Association, a full-time position that never existed in the organization's 150+ year history, that that put the livelihoods of Florida's nearly 100 harbor pilots in my hands. I dove headfirst into the job and learned at the most intimate level about an aspect of the maritime industry that very few outsiders have the privilege of seeing. Before long, we were met with the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown, which dealt a massive blow to Florida as the self-proclaimed "Cruise Capital of the World" with the cessation of cruise activity for nearly a year and a half and resulting supply chain crisis which upended their world and exposed every element of the fragile transportation framework that we rely upon day in and day out.

If that wasn't enough, we were also heavily engaged in blocking a potentially precedent setting citizens' initiative at the Port of Key West that could have had broad implications around the restriction of cargo across other seaports around the country and world. The measure served as a stark reminder that ports, although local in nature, are truly global in principle and must be viewed and protected as such.

In the summer of 2022, I was appointed Secretary of Commerce of Florida along with President and CEO of Enterprise Florida and entrusted with maintaining and growing what was then the state's \$1.5 trillion economy, and once again had the pleasure of working with all 16 of Florida's seaports in a larger economic development capacity. As the third largest state in the nation and 16th largest economy in the world, it was then that I also engaged heavily in international trade discussions with key trading partners around the globe as well as economic development efforts involving the newest mode of transportation to intersect with maritime, which is the incredibly exciting space industry.

I say all of this in the hopes to demonstrate not only my hands on experience, knowledge, and unique perspective of the maritime space, but also my sincere passion and commitment to the industry. If all my past superiors had enough faith in me not only to do the job at hand, but do it well, I hope so can you. More than anything, however, I hope my past shows just how dedicated I am to the economic and security interests of this great country.

If I am confirmed as a Commissioner of the FMC, I will uphold the statutory directives of the Ocean Shipping Reform Act of 2022 and ensure that the economic and homeland security needs of our country are always at the forefront of every discussion. I promise to be fair-minded and objective when collaborating with my fellow Commissioners and FMC staff to positively contribute to the FMC's vital and growing mission. I will work to eliminate unfair shipping practices by foreign governments and do everything in my power to guarantee that shippers, common carriers, ocean transportation intermediaries, and ports regulated by the FMC are provided with a fair market environment in which to operate.

Thank you again for the honor and privilege to sit before you today and for your hopeful support. I look forward to working with all of you.