

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 23, 2020

The Honorable Wilbur L. Ross, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Russell T. Vought
Acting Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Secretary Ross and Acting Director Vought:

We write concerning the \$300 million in fisheries assistance Congress made available through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. We urge the Department of Commerce and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to agree to a transparent distribution methodology that accounts for the economic devastation wrought by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the hardest hit states and to execute the disbursement of funds as soon as possible.

The commercial and recreational fishing industries in our home state of New Jersey have felt the devastating economic impact of the pandemic. The Trump Administration must swiftly make this financial assistance available to fishing communities and allocate it in a way that equitably accounts for the severe economic losses the hardest hit states have endured. It has been nearly a month since the CARES Act was signed into law by President Trump on March 27, 2020 and yet the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has not released guidance for the distribution of the emergency aid nor has it publicly stated when that guidance will be released.

We are deeply concerned about reports that the Administration is failing to consider Congressional intent in distributing this critical aid. We have been informed that NOAA has proposed allocating the distribution of funds using an unfair formula that calculates the share each state would receive by its average industry revenue. Such a formula would be inequitable because it fails to account for the state-specific economic devastation wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, including New Jersey, and it does not account for the rolling nature of state economy closures and the seasonality of certain important stock.

New Jersey is a COVID-19 hotspot and has the second highest number of cases in the nation. As such, our State's economy has been shuttered in order to curb the spread of the virus to protect the health of New Jerseyans and all Americans. The pandemic hit at the start of the critically important Striped Bass and Tautog season. With restaurants closed, demand for fish has collapsed. New Jersey fishing, processing, distributing, and charter boat workers have had to cease their routine work and have lost revenue. Some tackle shop companies have already announced they will be unable to reopen due to the missing income from recreational fishers. While many states with lower numbers of COVID-19 cases kept their commercial and

recreational fisheries open or have already completed their most important fishing seasons of the year, the pandemic has left our fishing industry in dire financial straits.

We urge the Department of Commerce and OMB to distribute financial aid fairly and in a way that accounts for the significant aid fishing communities in states like New Jersey need as a result of the early, severe, and inopportune impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Mikie Sherrill
Member of Congress



Albio Sires
Member of Congress



Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress



Tom Malinowski
Member of Congress



Chris Smith
Member of Congress



Andy Kim
Member of Congress



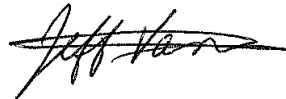
Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress



Donald Norcross
Member of Congress



Jeff Van Drew
Member of Congress



Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress



Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress