



City of Homer

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February 10, 2021

Governor Michael Dunleavy

P.O. Box 110001

Juneau, Alaska 99811-0001

Re: The Critical Importance of the Alaska Marine Highway System to Alaska Coastal Communities

Dear Honorable Governor Dunleavy,

The Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) is a critical extension of the state's blacktop highway infrastructure. Coastal communities, like Homer and Seldovia, have relied on this service for more than half a century. The Homer City Council strongly supports a reliable and dependable ferry service that benefits all Alaskans.

As the community at the end of the highway system that connects the Lower 48 to Alaska, Homer provides the launch point for the ferry to Seldovia, the Kodiak Archipelago, and the Alaska Peninsula. This point of transition from state highways to marine highways is very important to Homer, and critical to the physical health and economic resiliency of ferry-connected communities.

The Homer City Council supports the recommendations of the October 2020 "Alaska Marine Highway Reshaping Work Group Report to the Governor" as a method to maintain the essential transportation service provided by the AMHS. In particular, the City Council supports reforming the current board into an operations board tasked with maintaining the sustainability, consistency, and affordability (to the state and to the riders) of the ferry system. The operating board would help eliminate the continuing challenge for AMHS of frequent changes in policy direction coupled with insufficient appreciation of the long-term implications of such changes.

The Reshaping Work Group Report also noted that the current ferry fleet is aged which affects system reliability. Now passing a 50-year service life, the *MV Tustumena* is a prime example of the aging fleet. Replacing the *MV Tustumena* with a comparable ocean-capable (SOLAS) ferry

is imperative for the reliability and efficiency of the system for south central and southwest ferry routes. In recent years the *MV Tustumena* has undergone repairs well into the typical ferry operations season, leaving gaps in service and more extensive use of the *MV Kennecott*, a much larger ferry.

The Homer City Council supports the needs of the communities serviced by the south central and southwest ferry routes, Seldovia in particular. As Homer's neighbor across Kachemak Bay, residents of Seldovia rely on the ferry system to access the road system with their personal vehicles and travel to Homer for medical appointments, groceries, and other essential needs. Families and friends live on both sides of the bay and use the ferry for visits. Local businesses thrive by providing goods and services and shipping to Seldovia and residents of other communities accessed via the ferry system. The ferry even becomes a music venue for Seldovia's popular solstice music festival which is attended by Alaska residents and visitors far and wide.

The AMHS is important to the City of Homer, and the future of many rural Alaskan communities. We ask you and your administration to recognize the critical value of the AMHS to thriving coastal communities, to implement recommendations of the Reshaping Work Group Report, and work with coastal communities to come up with a solution that provides a reliable, dependable, and sustainable ferry system.

We look forward to, and would accept any invitation, to come to the table in partnership with other coastal communities and assist your Administration in addressing this critical and complex state service.

Respectfully submitted,



Ken Castner, Mayor