

**U.S. Department of  
Homeland Security**

**United States  
Coast Guard**



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Thirteenth District

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May 13, 2025

Dr. Sheri Tonn  
Chair, Washington State Board of Pilotage Commissioners  
2901 Third Ave., Ste. 500  
Seattle, WA 98121  
Email: TonnS@wsdot.wa.gov

Dear Dr. Tonn and Washington State Board of Pilotage Commissioners,

The U.S. Coast Guard and Washington State enjoy a strong partnership in providing for resilient maritime safety within Puget Sound and its adjacent waterways. I am writing to share significant concerns with the current motion before the Washington State Board of Pilotage Commissioners (BPC) to change established practices related to state pilotage carriage requirements outlined in RCW 88.16.180. The proposed motion has potential implications on international conventions and agreements, federal law, and the continued general safety of navigation.

I am concerned that this motion will have ramifications for vessels transiting directly to or from Canadian ports as well as U.S. flagged vessels. Specifically, the motion in question seeks to impose the carriage of Washington State licensed pilots aboard registered oil tankers of 5,000 gross tons or greater in Puget Sound and its adjacent waters. This could potentially include oil tankers that have previously been exempted from these requirements while transiting the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Haro Strait, and Boundary Pass.

Existing international conventions and treaty agreements between the governments of Canada and the U.S. currently protect and ensure the free flow of global maritime trade through these shared waters. Moreover, the agreements also institute cooperative vessel traffic management protocols between both nations to mitigate risk and ensure the safe movement of vessels through the waterways that comprise our northern maritime border. If enacted, the proposed motion potentially impacts vessels transiting pursuant to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and has the potential to compromise the continued efficacy of the existing cooperative vessel traffic service and hinder the ability to effectively mitigate risk within our shared waterways. The U.S. Coast Guard seeks clarification on how BPC interprets the "Puget Sound and its adjacent waters," language in RCW 88.16.180.

Another area of concern is the implication this motion and the supporting legal interpretations of the statute may have on U.S. flagged vessels. The same provisions that exempt vessels bound to or from Canadian ports or places, similarly exempt U.S. flagged vessels, operating on a coastwise endorsement, from current Washington State pilotage requirements. Under federal law, pilotage requirements for U.S. flagged vessels subject to inspection (such as oil tankers as identified in RCW 88.16.180), remain the purview of the federal government. While not explicitly identified as part of the motion before the BPC, the U.S. Coast Guard is concerned

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about any potential precedence set by negating these exemptions and attempting to impose state pilotage requirements on U.S. flagged vessels.

Lastly, we respect Washington State's desire to protect waterways, but the U.S. Coast Guard's position is that enforcement of RCW 88.16.180 in its current form will likely lead to more maritime incidents as a result of increasingly complex vessel transits within the Straits of Juan de Fuca, Haro Strait, and Boundary Pass. Namely, the measure would subject transiting vessels to extraneous pilot exchanges in order to comply with requirements simultaneously imposed by both Canadian authorities and Washington State. Accommodating these pilot exchanges would cause significant alterations to current traffic patterns and inexorably lead to an increased risk for vessel collisions and/or spills within the waterway.

I recognize many of these concerns are equally shared by you and members of the BPC, and as a result the state legislature recently ratified amendments to RCW 88.16.180 to alleviate these concerns for the next two years. Based on the collective impacts, I cannot stress enough the importance of ensuring that a more permanent resolution, one that extends beyond 2027, be identified and implemented.

The Coast Guard values its relationship with the BPC and Washington State in executing our shared goals of safe and efficient navigation. We look forward to continued cooperation on this matter. Should you have questions or wish to discuss this further, please feel free to contact me at (206) 747-8104 or [Darwin.A.Jensen@uscg.mil](mailto:Darwin.A.Jensen@uscg.mil).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. A. Jensen', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

D. A. JENSEN  
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard  
Chief, Prevention Division  
Thirteenth Coast Guard District