



City of Homer

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Office of the Mayor

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2 February 8, 2021

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5 Governor Michael Dunleavy

6 P.O. Box 110001

7 Juneau, Alaska 99811-0001

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

10 Communities

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12 Dear Honorable Governor Dunleavy,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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61 Respectfully submitted,

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64 Ken Castner, Mayor

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