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Cummings Joins Kick-off of Maritime Environmental Resource Center

New Program Will Help Stop Spread of Invasive Species

Washington, DC—Today, Congressman Elijah E. Cummings (D-Md.), Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, joined the U.S. Maritime Administration, the Maryland Department of Transportation, the Maryland Port Administration, and the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science to announce the kick-off of an important new environmental research and testing project, the Maritime Environmental Resource Center (MERC).

MERC was organized to help prevent the spread of economically and environmentally damaging invasive aquatic species into the Chesapeake Bay and other bodies of water in the U.S. that is caused by the discharge of a ship's ballast water. This water is picked up by ships to stabilize weight while underway and later emptied when a ship needs to change its stability or unload cargo. When a ship obtains ballast water from one body of water and discharges it into another, it can inadvertently release foreign and destructive aquatic species if they are present in the ballast water. There are currently more than 150 invasive species in the Chesapeake Bay, most of which are believed to have been introduced by ballast water.

The primary focus of MERC will be testing the effectiveness of systems designed to safely treat ballast water before it is discharged from ships. Testing will be performed aboard the *MV Cape Washington*, a working cargo ship provided by the Maritime Administration.

"I am honored to have helped bring together these State and Federal partners to protect our waters from invasive species. The work being done by MERC will be critical to protecting the marine environment both here in the Bay and throughout the entire U.S.," **Congressman Cummings** said. "The efforts of this program and the stellar research team that is running it will be appreciated for generations to come."

Elizabeth Megginson, Acting Deputy Administrator and Chief Counsel of the Maritime

Administration, said, "This is a great day for the Maritime Administration! The commencement of ballast water technology testing aboard the *MV Cape Washington* is the culmination of many years of hard work."

"The Maritime Environmental Resource Center program will enable us to better protect the Chesapeake Bay from invasive species by validating treatment systems designed to minimize and if possible, eliminate the threat of invasive species from ballast water," said **Maryland Transportation Secretary John D.**

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Porcari. “A mobile ballast water testing system will provide maritime vessels with the means to effectively meet existing and future ballast water criteria and regulations, a win-win for Maryland’s environmental and economic interests.”

“The Maritime Environmental Resource Center model capitalizes on the diverse set of perspectives and expertise provided by the region’s academic and maritime leaders,” said **University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science President Dr. Donald Boesch.** “This partner-oriented approach is critical to developing and testing the new technologies needed to ensure a sustainable port and healthy Chesapeake Bay.”

“The MERC team looks forward to helping to solve critical environmental and economic issues facing the international maritime community, particularly as they impact us here on the Chesapeake Bay,” said Dr. **Mario N. Tamburri, Director of MERC.** “We look forward to continuing our cooperative relationship with the Maritime Administration as MERC’s efforts move forward.”

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