

July 16, 2020

The Honorable Jenny Durkan, Mayor
Office of the Mayor
600 4th Avenue, Suite 7
Seattle, WA 98104
Sent Via Electronic Mail

RE: *Urging that in evaluations of Seattle Police Department budget cutbacks, the City ensure the survival of a Seattle Harbor Patrol that is most critical during these summer months*

Dear Mayor Durkan:

We are writing in our roles as Chair of the House Committee that has jurisdiction over matters impacting State Parks (*including boating safety*), and as Presidents of statewide organizations that support the \$7 billion recreational boating sector and the 240,000 registered boaters in our state -- with many of those jobs and boaters housed in Seattle.

We are entering into a very important and timely discussion as to how Seattle and other cities re-imagine policing and public safety – and we stand with you on many of the ideas you have laid out regarding accountability, independent investigations of use of force, disciplinary measures, and uniform policies and training. However, as you and City Councilmembers debate potential cuts to the Seattle Police Department budget, we want to call to your attention a lower-profile yet critical division within Seattle PD which ensures the very survival of many of our citizens and thus should be assured its *own* survival during this policy debate: the Seattle Harbor Patrol.

Our educated guess is that very few of your citizens are aware of the massive and vital role that the Seattle Harbor Patrol plays in keeping our area's saltwater and freshwater bodies safe. They cover more than 250 miles of shoreline, provide the only 24-hour response unit on Lake Washington, and are often among the first to respond to serious incidents not only within their own boundaries but in communities such as Mercer Island, Kirkland, and Kenmore. We take them for granted during the Opening Day of boating season, on July 4th, for Seafair week activities, and in connecting with long-distance swimming and sailing and paddle boarding events that are so popular in our region. They are a natural and pivotal partner for our safe boating, education, and awareness work.

It is our understanding that if a 50 percent reduction in the Seattle Police Department budget were to be made, it may result in the elimination of the Seattle Harbor Patrol and in leaving waterway safety to a Seattle Fire Department that does not currently *have* any immediate access. As we enter our area's warmest weather months of the year, that would be not only a devastating decision, but, quite literally, could be a fatally-devastating decision. The difference between life and death on our waterways comes down to minutes and even seconds. If a drowning occurs, if an accident happens, if divers are needed, if a search is necessary, having Harbor Patrol officers, or equivalent, who can act quickly and decisively can truly be what separates a life saved from a life lost.

One of our marina operators tells us the Seattle Harbor Patrol carries out nearly all marine rescue operations inside of the Ballard Locks, as well as north of the West Point Treatment plant. That same operator estimates that if the role and function of Harbor Patrol were to go away, and responses to on-water incidents was left to the Seattle Fire Department and the Coast Guard, what is now a less-than-10-

minutes response could become a 20- to 30-minute response. That is a potentially life-threatening delay.

The recent death of Naya Rivera, the 33-year-old co-star of the recent television series *Glee*, is an illustration of the tragedy that can befall those on our waterways. We can enact the strongest boating safety laws possible, but we cannot always control the conduct or behavior of the individuals who use our lakes and rivers and Sound – so we must also have appropriate level of personnel and equipment in place to give us the best chance to save lives when one is in the balance. This matters year-round, but in July, August, and September, its meaning and criticality multiplies exponentially.

We respectfully ask for the help of you, your staff, and Seattle City Councilmembers for a thoughtful dialogue around Police Department operations and what the Seattle community needs. Please do not make cuts to a Seattle Harbor Patrol resource that saves lives on the water.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Rep. Cindy Ryu, 32nd LD Pos. 1
Convener of Washington State Outdoor Recreation Roundtable



Bob Wise, President
Recreational Boating Assn. of Washington (RBAW)



George Harris, President/CEO
NW Marine Trade Association (NMTA)



Peter Schrapen
President, Washington Maritime Federation