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Member of the National League of Cities and the National Association of Counties

The Honorable Grier Hopkins
Chair, House Transportation
Alaska State Legislature

March 18, 2021

RE: AML HJR13 Support – Urging Exemption for Cruise Ships; Waiver from Passenger Vessel Services Act

Representative Hopkins,

The Alaska Conference of Mayors (ACoM) passed Resolution 2021.03, encouraging State action in support of economic recovery. ACoM encourages State officials to consider all the tools at their disposal to assist in Alaska's economic recovery. The resolution references the impacts to communities of the lack of cruise ships, including as a result of CDC actions.

As we approach the 2021 cruise ship season, having to take into account the Government of Canada's actions restricting calls, we know that this directly limits the size of cruise ships able to serve Alaska. Alaska's communities that are cruise-dependent – ranging from Ketchikan to Whittier to Denali Borough – experienced incredible hardship this last year. A second year of nonexistent or reduced sailings will exacerbate their challenges. This goes well beyond our advocacy for strengthening local governments – the residents and economies of these communities depend on Alaska's economic recovery.

AML appreciates the Legislature's interest in these issues, and hopes for continued support as it works its way through Committee. Clearly, Alaska needs Congress to act. We hope for action that addresses Canada's concerns, bypasses Canada's decision by waiving provisions of the Passenger Vessel Services Act, and produces from the CDC guidance that allows for safe operations during this summer's cruise ship season.

We recognize that no matter what, this cruise ship season will look and feel different. There are many also looking at a new normal and what the right level of activity should be for any one community. Those are local decisions that will depend on the opportunity to debate it, not the lack thereof. Communities are preparing for many eventualities, and foremost among them ways to effectively and safely ensure operations. At this point Alaska has a strong track record. Local governments involved in this effort need time to plan and adjust to new circumstances.

We encourage the Legislature to act quickly on these resolutions, and for our Congressional delegation to meet that action with urgency on their side.

Sincerely,

Nils Andreassen
Executive Director