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Florida's Harbor Pilots Call on FAMO to Stop Playing Games with Port Safety

Tallahassee, Fla. – The Florida Harbor Pilots Association (FHPA) today called on the Florida Alliance of Maritime Organizations (FAMO) to stop playing games with the safety of Florida's Ports. After months of sensationalized attacks and even manipulating the findings of an independent study conducted, at their behest, by OPPAGA, FAMO and its membership of foreign cruise and cargo companies are now publicly admitting that getting in and out of Florida's Ports is a game.

“Who gets out first, who let's go of the lines first...yeah, that's a game between different shipping companies...we can use binoculars and we can look and say, they're not singling up. Yeah, it's a game.” – said Bill Wright, Senior Vice President, Marine Operations for Royal Caribbean International Cruise Lines, representing FAMO, during a presentation before the House Roads, Bridges & Port Council on March 18, 2010, in Tallahassee.

“Florida's harbor pilots take their jobs very seriously, and we take the safety and stability of every Florida port very seriously,” explained Captain Joe Brown of the St. Johns Bar Pilots Association and the president of the Florida Harbor Pilots Association. “These ship captains know that harbor pilots are their reality check and the only reason why they have dragged our good profession through the mud is to protect their bottom lines. These captains of foreign-owned ships claim that technology has deemed harbor pilots obsolete, but like Mr. Wright said, GPS in a ship is similar to GPS in a car, but last time I checked, GPS in either instance, only tells you where to turn, it does not make the turn for you or prevent you from hitting something if you make the turn too wide or too narrow. That is what our harbor pilots do, and after yesterday's testimony – it is crystal clear why we are vital.”

“None of this is a game to us, and how fast a mammoth-size ship can leave a port should not be a game to any ship captain,” said Captain Brown. “Mr. Wright, in his own words, highlighted why independent judgment is paramount; and given the fact that Mr. Wright has been at the helm of the Oasis of the Seas, the largest cruise ship in the world, his admissions before the House committee yesterday is frightening.”

“We are not in a race to enter or leave a port. We are insulated from the financial pressures that ship captains have to constantly worry about and our only focus is safety. Ship captains are beholden to their employer and have to answer to their employer if they burn too much fuel, if they are late to a Port of Call or if there is an incident on their ship that may negatively affect the image of their cruise line,” concluded Captain Brown.

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The FHPA represents the interests of Florida's 97 professional harbor pilots, advocating on their behalf on various state and federal issues that impact the harbor pilots. The FHPA encourages its members to perform their function as pilots in a professional manner and subscribes to the philosophy that all harbor pilots should cooperate with all federal, state and local governmental authorities and regulatory bodies to the fullest extent possible in the preservation of life, the environment and property.

For more information on the FHPA, please visit www.floridapilots.com.

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