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ALASKA CHAMBER ADOPTS NEW POSITION IN SUPPORT OF AMHS SERVICE & REFORM

CORDOVA ALASKA, November 12, 2019 – On Wednesday, October 30th, Cordova Chamber of Commerce along with Southeast Conference and Sealaska Corporation, brought forth a new policy position proposal to the statewide Chamber which recognizes the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) as a “critical component of the statewide intermodal transportation system and economy of Alaska” and encourages sustainable reform. The position was adopted by the Alaska State Chamber at its annual Policy Forum by a vote of fifty-one to four. “We’re grateful to the many businesses and communities who are standing with us to acknowledge the importance of providing consistent, reliable marine transportation services to Alaska communities for the benefit of the statewide economy,” said Cathy Renfeldt, executive director of Cordova Chamber of Commerce.

In the midst of an unexpected eight-month service gap, Cordova can attest to the effects of an abrupt loss in marine highway service to businesses, schools, and communities as a whole. “Many of our businesses are built around this piece of statewide infrastructure,” noted Renfeldt. “When AMHS service disappears for months on end with no time to adjust business plans, those impacts are significant and far-reaching. The entire state will feel it if 75,000 Alaska residents are forced to send their money out of state for basic items which would normally be stocked from Anchorage or the Valley.”

Southeast Conference Executive Director Robert Venables said, “the business community needed to participate and had a role to play in a reformed ferry system.” Renfeldt agrees, “We recognize that reform is needed, and know any transition will take time. These businesses and communities need reliable transportation now and in the future.”

The Alaska Chamber represents 700+ members and works as the voice of Alaska business to influence policy and state and federal legislation. Each year at the Policy Forum, its members vote on the positions that the Chamber will take on to develop the advocacy platform reflective of the Alaska business community. The breadth and diversity of its priorities and positions reflect Alaska Chamber’s broad-based membership. This year, Cordova Chamber of Commerce, Southeast Conference and Sealaska collaborated to bring forth a policy proposal recognizing the critical role Alaska Marine Highway service plays in the statewide economy and encouraging reform to right-size and improve efficiencies to the AMHS system. Alaska Chamber’s legislative affairs committee endorsed the position at its Policy Forum, and with a vote on the floor, the new policy position was adopted by the membership. Official supporters of the position include: Juneau Chamber of Commerce, Prince of Wales Chamber of Commerce, Seward Chamber of Commerce, Kodiak Chamber of Commerce, Valdez Convention and Visitors Bureau, Petersburg Chamber of Commerce, Whittier Chamber of Commerce, Haines Chamber of Commerce, Prince William Sound Economic Development District, Seldovia Chamber of Commerce, and Homer Chamber of Commerce. The final language is as follows:

New Position Title:

Support a reformed, right-sized and sustainable Alaska Marine Highway System as a critical component of the statewide intermodal transportation system and economy of Alaska.

Position Statement:

Support the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) mission to provide consistent, reliable marine transportation services to Alaska communities for the benefit of the statewide economy. Support reform initiatives to reform and right-size the operations with executive governance that will control costs similar to the proposal developed by statewide business and community leaders at www.AMHSreform.com.

The Cordova Chamber of Commerce is governed by a 16-member board of directors and represents over 140 business and individual members within Cordova and Prince William Sound. In addition to operating the Cordova Visitor Center, the Chamber's work also includes economic development, quality of life enhancement, destination marketing and leadership development. Contact the Cordova Chamber at 907-424-7260 for more information or visit cordovachamber.com.

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