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December 14, 2023

Admiral Linda L. Fagan
Commandant
United States Coast Guard
2703 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave. SE
Washington, DC 20593

Admiral Fagan,

I write regarding the oil spill that occurred in Bayonne, NJ on November 22, 2023. I'm grateful that the U.S. Coast Guard responded quickly to my concerns after pollution from the spill was discovered off the coast of Long Branch and Monmouth Beach. Thanks to your agency's efforts, 1,000 pounds of tar balls and oil-laden debris have so far been removed from our beaches.

This incident raises serious new questions and concerns for the current and future environmental health of our region. First, I am glad that existing reporting regulations appear to have been followed and the Vane Brothers Company self-identified as the responsible party and disclosed their spill to the Coast Guard on November 22. However, I am deeply concerned that after the Coast Guard's initial investigation, your agency concluded that the oil spill was contained to the Vane Brothers' barge and containment boom. Unfortunately, that inaccurate conclusion led to hundreds of gallons of oil causing environmental harm dozens of miles away to remain unaddressed.

While I appreciate the Coast Guard's swift response once your agency was notified on November 27 about reports of pollution in our Atlantic environment, the public should not bear responsibility for monitoring federal oil spill containment efforts nor should the spill have reached so far given intended environmental safeguards. A similar oil spill during the Jersey Shore's peak tourism and recreation season could cost tens of millions of dollars in economic damage and lost income for residents due to closed beaches.

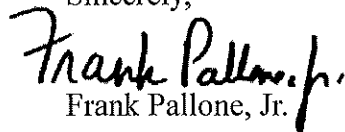
The restoration of the health and beauty of our beaches is vital. I urge you to continue to carry out a robust cleanup effort to ensure full environmental remediation of this spill. In addition, your conclusions from a robust investigation will help policymakers work with you to prevent future spills. I respectfully request answers to the following questions no later than January 4, 2024:

- What steps is the Coast Guard taking to ensure full environmental remediation?
- What is the timeline for the investigation?
- What factors led to the Coast Guard's initial incorrect conclusion that the spill was contained to the Vane Brother Company barge and containment boom?
- Did the Vane Brothers Company conceal its spill into the broader environment?

- Is the Coast Guard conducting an environmental damage assessment?
- What factors will contribute to the Coast Guard's determination of the Vane Brothers Company civil penalty?
- What outreach to affected communities is the Coast Guard conducting to promote the phone hotline that members of the public can call to submit for oil spill damages?

I continue to stand ready to help deliver whatever resources or authorities may be necessary to make sure our Atlantic Coast environment is clean, prevent future spills, and hold the responsible party fully accountable under the law for this damage to our waterways.

Sincerely,


Frank Pallone, Jr.