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Senator Jeanne Shaheen
Chair
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Jerry Moran
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Shaheen and Ranking Member Moran,

Stronger America Through Seafood, a coalition of industry partners representing the seafood supply chain, is working in support of increased U.S. production of healthful, sustainable, and affordable seafood. We are writing today to request that you support \$25 million in annual funding for the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)'s Aquaculture Office in the fiscal year 2024 Commerce, Justice and Science (CJS) Appropriations Act, and the language below for inclusion in the related Explanatory Statement.

"The Committee recognizes the significant potential for development of American offshore aquaculture to increase U.S. production of healthful, sustainable and affordable seafood. As the fastest growing food production sector in the world, responsible aquaculture development presents opportunities for meaningful economic growth in coastal communities and among their supply chain partners, while ensuring that Americans have access to responsibly farmed local seafood. The National Marine Fisheries Service's Aquaculture program recently released a 5-Year strategic plan for aquaculture that will support a U.S. aquaculture industry as part of a competitive domestic seafood sector. The Committee fully supports the activities of the Aquaculture Program and includes \$25,000,000 to implement this strategic plan, including continued work on Aquaculture Opportunity Areas, environmental assessments, science-based tools and modeling and increased economic development programs."

Aquaculture is the fastest growing food production sector in the world and is responsible for nearly all global supply growth since the 1990s. With half of all seafood consumed today being farm raised, aquaculture presents a unique opportunity to build an American seafood industry that can support a diverse workforce, enhance sustainable ecosystems and guarantee healthful, locally sourced protein for American consumers.

Today, the U.S. lags far behind the rest of the world in farmed seafood production. The single biggest reason is the lack of a clear regulatory pathway for permitting new projects, particularly offshore. This challenging reality has forced many American businesses to invest in other countries, resulting in the U.S. importing at least 70% of its seafood.

As you may know, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)'s Aquaculture Program recently announced a five-year strategic plan laying out a framework to "help achieve a robust, thriving, and diverse U.S. aquaculture industry as part of a resilient seafood sector." They continue to work on

actively coordinating across agencies towards a comprehensive regulatory foundation for aquaculture. This process includes siting analysis for future Aquaculture Opportunity Areas (AOAs) in federal waters, interagency coordination on National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) review and Environmental Impact Statements (EIS), development of science-based tools and modeling, and associated economic development programs like workforce training and community planning activities which will ensure the economic benefits of aquaculture are realized across all stakeholder groups.

The program needs additional funds to adequately fulfill its mission, and we believe a funding level of \$25 million will meet these needs.

By prioritizing domestic aquaculture, you will support the growth of an American seafood community that is resilient to economic and climate changes and is part of a holistic approach to a greater sustainable food strategy.

We appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to working with you to ensure domestic aquaculture production is a priority now and in the future.

Respectfully,

Drue Banta Winters
Campaign Manager
Stronger America Through Seafood