

Testimony of Richard A. Difede
President, Gold Coast Yachts, Inc.
Bill 35-0133

Good morning Honorable Novelle E. Francis, Jr., President 35th legislature, Honorable Marvin A. Blyden, Vice President, Sen. Donna Frett-Gregory, Chair of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance, other Members and the viewing and listening audience. My name is Richard A. Difede. I am President of Gold Coast Yachts, Inc. , a company which has been designing and building commercial and recreational multihull vessels for the past 39 years on St. Croix.

I am here to give testimony on Bill No. 35-0133 - An Act amending title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 15, relating to scholarships to support individuals interested in pursuing a career in the marine industry.

The Marine Industry is a high demand / high wage sector with a multiplicity of craft skill, professional mariner and port and logistics employment opportunities. Mariners, tradesmen and marine transportation specialists are in high demand as the labor shortage that has impacted countless shoreside industries has also impacted the maritime trades.

The retirement of older mariners, the developing offshore wind industry and worldwide demand for workers in the marine transportation and port sector is creating openings faster than companies can fill the positions. Opportunities abound and demand is highest for personnel with greater experience and advanced training.

- Randall Rockwood, a vice president of Mid-Atlantic Maritime Academy recently stated, “ we see that the U.S. maritime job market is very dynamic and challenging for the mariner and employer, with ever-increasing regulatory requirements,” “Employers are aggressively recruiting all ratings and ranks above entry level. Our school’s bulletin boards are full of opportunities.”
- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects there will be 8,400 openings for water transportation workers each year, on average, over the next decade. Many of those openings are expected to result from the need to replace workers who move to new industries or retire.
- “There is lots of movement in the maritime job market,” said Lily Ploski, director of career services at California State University Maritime Academy. “Employers are increasing pay and benefits, but they are still having a hard time finding enough employees.”
- According to published reports Washington State Ferries, the nation’s largest ferry system reduced service on numerous routes due to labor shortages last year.
- Recruiting mariners has become more difficult as shoreside salaries increase, narrowing the gap between what a worker can earn offshore versus what they can make on land.
- The rapidly growing offshore wind sector will put pressure on the maritime job market for years to come. The burgeoning industry will create thousands of new positions over the next decade. The US Dept of Energy predicts during the build out phase there will be a need for 31,300 full-time-equivalent jobs per year and during the [offshore wind] operating period, there will be a need for 13,400 full-time-equivalent jobs per year for operating and maintenance technicians, management, and supply chain jobs.

- The worldwide population of seafarers serving on internationally trading merchant ships is estimated at 1,892,720 seafarers, of which 857,540 are officers and 1,035,180 are ratings. While the global supply of officers is forecast to increase steadily, this trend is expected to be outpaced by increasing demand.

Taken together, job openings are plentiful across the industry.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook indicates that the industry and relevant stakeholders should not expect there to be an abundant supply of qualified and competent seafarers without concerted efforts and measures to address key manpower issues, through promotion of careers at sea, enhancement of maritime education and training worldwide, addressing the retention of seafarers.

The maritime industry includes a wide array of different jobs, ranging from working on the deck of a ship to working on ship engines. While most maritime careers involve working on ships, there are also many land-based jobs. Most of the industry involves the transportation of goods and people over large waterways, such as with cruise liners, cargo ships, and ferries. The most in-demand jobs include captains, mates, able body seamen, naval architecture, marine and ocean engineering, ship and boat building, mechanics, electricians, pipefitters, welders, and mechanical engineers all of which require postsecondary training and specialized skills.

Examples of High Paying Maritime Jobs

Pilot - Salary range: \$100,000-\$230,000 per year

A boat pilot operates a shipping vessel that may serve in several capacities, from transporting goods to ferrying passengers through areas where a captain may not have local knowledge for navigation.

Ship Pilot - Salary range: \$173,500-\$250,500 per year

A ship pilot is a captain responsible for the overall operation and navigation on board a large boat or ship. The types of ships that can be piloted vary widely depending on the use of the vessel. Some common examples include cargo ships, oil tankers, and passenger ships. These ships can be piloted to any port whether it is on the ocean or water ways.

First Officer/ First Mate - Salary range: \$84,500-\$206,000 per year

Responsibilities include taking over full command of the vessel, crew, and passengers if the captain is no longer able to do so.

Ferry Captain - Salary range: \$100,000-\$155,000 per year

A ferry captain operates passenger vessels between ports.

Tugboat Captain - Salary range: \$69,000-\$128,000 per year

A tugboat captain or tugboat operator, is the pilot of a small vessel that helps larger crafts steer in tight spaces where their engines cannot safely reach full power.

Ship Engineer - Salary range: \$129,000-\$129,000 per year

The duties of a ship engineer include the operation and maintenance of a ship's engine, boiler, pumps, generator, and other machinery.

Able Seaman - Salary range: \$45,000-\$83,500 per year

An able seaman provides a variety of services on a merchant ship. They may be asked to act as helmsman and navigate the boat, use equipment during emergencies, perform maintenance and sanitation, enforce security measures, operate deck machinery, keep watch for obstructions, or handle cargo.

Port Captain - Salary range: \$89,000-\$121,500 per year

A port captain oversees the ships in a port to ensure they are ready for their voyages. Responsibilities include making sure the vessel complies with all maritime safety protocols, crews are sufficient in size and qualifications, the proper equipment is on board, and the captain is doing their job properly.

Port Engineer - Salary range: \$92,500-\$187,000 per year

A port engineer works on the technical aspects of operations and infrastructure at a port. You oversee port maintenance and repair, and your duties include ensuring that engineering work meets safety standards and marine regulations.

Naval Architect - Salary range - \$90,000-\$160,000 per year

A naval architect utilizes technical and scientific knowledge of physics and materials, engineering, and architecture to manage projects and create blueprints to design, build, maintain and repair ships, boats and other water vehicles.

Marine Service Manager - Salary range: \$72,000-\$91,000 per year

The job duties of a marine service manager revolve around providing boat repair service. As a marine service manager responsibilities include inspecting a vessel while it is in port or during seagoing operations. You make suggestions to the ship owners or operators about necessary repairs and safety upgrades and work with tradespeople to facilitate these improvements.

Marine Technicians - Salary range: \$53,500-\$110,000 per year

The trades diagnose, and repair all types of water-based vessels. Continuous education is important, as there is a need to continually learn about new equipment, materials and maintenance techniques.

Marine Surveyor - Salary range: \$69,000-\$100,000 per year

The job of a marine surveyor is to inspect vessels. Surveyors check every inch of a ship to ensure that the vessel is seaworthy and up to code. They also inspect the loading and unloading of cargo on a ship.

The Legislature, along with the VIWDB, DOE, UVI, DOL and others have the responsibility to assess, convene and leverage resources to support the training and education pipeline leading to high demand, high wage and emerging new industries. (See attached).

Bill No. 35-0133 is a good first step to recognizing the value of the Marine Industry to the Territory and its people and supporting career development in this important Sector.

It has my full support.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard A. Difede". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a distinct "Difede" at the end.

Richard A. Difede

Gold Coast Yachts, Inc.