Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

October 18, 2016

The Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy
Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works
U.S. Department of Defense
108 Army Pentagon, Room 3E446
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Dear Assistant Secretary Darcy:

We are writing in support of the urgent need for maintenance dredging of the York Harbor Federal Navigation Project (FNP) in York, Maine, and the Saco River FNP in Saco and Biddeford, Maine, to address significant safety and navigational access concerns in the region.

York Harbor was last dredged in 1996. The 42,000 cubic yards of sand, silt, and clay that have accumulated since then need to be removed. Nearly two years ago, the New England District of the Army Corps of Engineers stated that significant shoaling in the harbor is "hindering navigational access and compromising vessel safety," and that inaction "would allow existing conditions to remain and worsen as shoaling continues." The Town of York has secured all the necessary permits to remove this material, and the project has been "shovel-ready" for more than a year. According to the New England District, York would most likely need to reapply for these permits and bear the significant financial costs of that process all over again if the project is not funded this fiscal year. The project is estimated to cost between $2 and $3 million, but the Corps has not yet funded it despite the significant funding provided by Congress in recent years to maintain small harbors like York and Saco River.

Recently, the towns of Saco and Biddeford similarly completed the permit process necessary for the Saco River dredging project, which is estimated to cost approximately $3.2 million. This FNP was last dredged in 1993. More than 150,000 cubic yards of sand have accumulated since then and need to be removed. Significantly, nearby Camp Ellis Beach is in dire need of clean sand to alleviate on-going erosion. To date, 37 homes have reportedly been lost due to this erosion. The sooner the Corps funds the Saco River project, the sooner that Camp Ellis Beach can be replenished with material dredged from the Saco River.

Small ports and harbors like York and Saco River are the economic lifeblood for many coastal communities in Maine. In allocating funds that Congress makes available to the Corps each year for the operation and maintenance of our nation's water infrastructure, the law requires the Corps to consider factors other than tonnage transiting through a harbor, to include potential for regional or local economic development. In this respect, commercial activity on the Saco River—home to more than 40 commercial fishing vessels—contributes more than $53 million in economic impact to the community each year, and York Harbor produces a direct economic benefit of $12 million annually.

To address these critical needs and maintain our essential water infrastructure, we urge you to prioritize funding in this fiscal year the maintenance dredging of both the York Harbor

and Saco River FNPs, consistent with all applicable laws and regulations. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please contact us directly or have your staff contact our staff members Jay Lim (Collins) at (202) 224-2523, Morgan Cashwell (King) at (202) 224-5344, and Kimber Colton (Pingree) at (202) 225-6116, should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Susan M. Collins
U.S. Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.
U.S. Senator

Chellie Pingree
U.S. Representative