Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. I am Roland Lewis, President and CEO of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance (MWA). The MWA is a coalition of over 700 businesses, community and recreational groups, educational institutions, and other stakeholders committed to transforming the New York and New Jersey Harbor and its waterways to make them cleaner and more accessible, a vibrant place to play, learn, and work with great parks, great jobs and great transportation for all.

Over the past decade, Governors Island has developed into a tremendous asset for the city, reorienting New Yorkers’ attention to their waterfront and serving as a unique destination for historic education, innovative art, and peaceful outdoor respite. MWA has worked hard to promote the wealth of amenities and attractions packed onto this tiny island. For instance, for the past five years we have brought the popular City of Water Day—a dynamic day of free boat rides, kayaking, fishing, canoeing, waterfront activities, performances, food, ferries, and more—to Governors Island. Last year City of Water Day attracted a record 16,000 visitors to Governors Island, with over 25,000 regionwide, and we are confident that this year’s event, taking place on Saturday, July 20th, will draw even more people to the water.
Governors Island traces its roots back to a proud maritime heritage, with ships sailing in and out of the island’s active port for more than two centuries. However, with the further redevelopment plans for the island, the future of the island’s maritime functions is unclear. Imagine a Governors Island that allows passing pleasure crafts of all shapes and sizes to tie up so their passengers may enjoy a landside afternoon in the harbor. Or facilities that allow for human-powered boats to load and unload, giving visitors the chance to get on the water, not just near it. These types of uses will enhance the visitor experience by seamlessly blending land and water. Accordingly, we strongly encourage the Trust for Governors Island to strengthen and grow the island’s maritime facilities to maintain its place as an active port of New York Harbor.

Opportunities to strengthen and activate maritime infrastructure exist across the island. For example, the addition of a spud barge at Yankee Pier will open landing access to low-freeboard boats passing through the harbor, while opening access to the beach along Buttermilk Channel will create easy launch opportunities for kayaks and canoes into the harbor. In addition, the rehabilitation of the island’s piers can allow for more active uses, from berthing to waterfront dining to large-scale events. Lastly, while Governors Island is fortunate to enjoy free, direct ferry service from Lower Manhattan, reaching the island from other origins generally involves traveling circuitous routes. Ferry service to Governors Island from waterfront areas such as Red Hook, St. George, Sunset Park, Hoboken, or, as MWA does on City of Water Day, Liberty State
Park would afford access to the island to a substantially wider audience, as well as help to meet the city’s goal of expanded waterborne transit.

I thank you again for the opportunity to read this testimony, and I look forward to a bright future for Governors Island.