Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. I am Roland Lewis, President and CEO of the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance (MWA). The MWA is a coalition of nearly 800 community and recreational groups, educational institutions, businesses, and other stakeholders committed to restoring the New York and New Jersey Harbor.

Governors Island is the jewel of that Harbor, and its ongoing transformation into a public space has been critical for restoring New Yorkers’ connection with their waterfront. Thousands of people have visited the Island in recent years to take in the stunning views of Lower Manhattan, Staten Island, Brooklyn, and, of course, Liberty and Ellis Islands, serving as a reminder that we are indeed “island people.”

MWA is proud to anchor our signature event, City of Water Day, each year on Governors Island. Last year, over 25,000 people of all ages participated in City of Water Day, a free public event celebrated throughout the harbor to reconnect people with the water that surrounds us, through educational boat tours, kayak lessons, and hands-on marine science lessons. Governors Island offers the perfect backdrop for that event, as its historic buildings, and dramatic landscape provide opportunities for passive recreation and active exploration. It is truly one of those special “only-in-New-York” experiences.

MWA is thrilled that this year, Governors Island will be open to the public seven days a week, expanding New Yorkers’ and visitors’ opportunities to see the best of what the city has to offer. It is truly significant that the general public will now be able to visit the island as they do any other urban park. Yet we also salute the other educational and cultural resources that Governors Island harbors, including the
New York Harbor School, New York’s maritime high school, which continues to train the mariners and marine scientists of tomorrow, as well as the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council’s arts center and cultural programming in Building 110.

As MWA’s Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines program, or WEDG, incentivizes best practices for resilient, ecological, and publically accessible design for building at the water’s edge, we recognize many of the improvements made on Governors Island to withstand storm surges and future flooding. These strategies include replacing the existing seawall with a rip-rap revetment and adding a second barrier, or a “seatwall,” to provide erosion control and public seating.

At the same time, we also believe that as park renovations proceed, more attention needs to be given to the waterside of Governors Island. The Island, disconnected from the region’s road and mass transit networks, is of course only accessible by boat. We need to think about how we can improve access and make necessary maritime infrastructure improvements in order to expand access to the island for all to enjoy. As a result, MWA is calling for a short and long term maritime plan for the island to address how the island connects with and complements the Harbor as a whole and the surrounding waterfronts. Possible elements of that plan may include:

- renovation and improvement of Yankee pier including water and power hook-ups
- protecting the cove at Pier 101 from wake action
- more frequent ferry service to Soissons Dock
- regular year-round ferry service to Brooklyn
- access to the "beach" on the east side of the Island that is visible at low tide
- consideration of what other parts of the waterfront of the Island can have a “soft-shore”

MWA looks forward to working with elected leaders, Governors Island’s key stakeholders, community members, and experts in the maritime and coastal engineering community to address many of these issues and generate other ideas for ways to increase access. Together, we hope to continue to reconnect New Yorkers with their waterways, and expand access to the “oasis” of our Harbor, Governors Island, for all.