



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Peter A. DeFazio
Chairman

Katherine W. Dedrick
Staff Director

Sam Graves
Ranking Member

Paul J. Sasse
Republican Staff Director

August 16, 2021

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General
Government Accountability Office
441 G St., NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

The U.S. Coast Guard, a component within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is planning to spend more than \$2.5 billion to acquire three Polar Security Cutters (PSCs) to address icebreaking capability gaps in the Arctic and Antarctic—high latitude regions vital to the United States national interests.¹ The PSC's shipbuilder, VT Halter, begun designing the cutters but challenges, including impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, have delayed these efforts as well as the start of lead ship construction.² To mitigate the effect of these delays, DHS and the Coast Guard may authorize the start of construction before the design is stabilized—a practice that has resulted in poor outcomes, including cost growth, for other shipbuilding programs. Further, with the delivery of the first cutter delayed, the Coast Guard must continue to rely on the aging *Polar Star*—the U.S.'s only operational heavy icebreaker—and explore other options to address the capability gaps, which could be costly.³

Given the schedule delays and potential for cost growth, continued oversight of the PSC program is critical. As such, the Committee requests that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) review the management of the PSC acquisition program and the Coast Guard's efforts to address icebreaking capability gaps until the PSCs are fully operational, including but not limited to:

- The status of the PSC acquisition program and Coast Guard's efforts to manage schedule delays and cost growth;
- The status of efforts to maintain and extend the life of the *Polar Star*; and

¹ GAO, *Arctic Capabilities: Coast Guard Is Taking Steps to Address Key Challenges, but Additional Work Remains* (February 5, 2020), available at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-374t>.

² U.S. Naval Institute News. *VT Halter Marine to Build New Coast Guard Icebreaker*. (April 23, 2019), available at <https://news.usni.org/2019/04/23/vt-halter-marine-to-build-new-coast-guard-icebreaker>.

³ Congressional Research Service, *Coast Guard Polar Security Cutter Program: Background and Issues for Congress* (July 27, 2021), available at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/weapons/RL34391.pdf>.

- The status of the Coast Guard's efforts to explore other icebreaking alternatives.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Matt Dwyer at 202-225-4472 or John Clark Rayfield at 202-225-3372.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Peter A. DeFazio, which appears to read "Peter DeFazio".

Peter A. DeFazio
Chair

A blue ink signature of Sam Graves, which appears to read "Sam Graves".

Sam Graves
Ranking Member