

# St. Petersburg Times

Wednesday, October 21, 2009

## Harbor pilots' pay excessive, says study by cruise lines, cargo shippers

By Steve Huettel

Florida's harbor pilots earn excessive pay because of an archaic state regulatory system that sets rates and limits the profession's numbers, said a study released Tuesday by an alliance of cruise lines and cargo shippers.

Salaries for pilots in the state's 14 deepwater ports average \$368,000 year, according to the study sponsored by the Florida Alliance of Maritime Organizations.

That was more than other professions with similar responsibilities: international airline pilots (\$225,000) and air traffic controllers (\$111,000). Harbor pilots earn 60 percent more than captains of U.S.-registered ships and 235 percent more than foreign-registered ship captains, the study says.

"The rates at which state-licensed pilots are paid are the result of a system that stifles competition vs. the benefits of the free market," said Antonio "Tony" Villamil, principal economic adviser for the Washington Group in Miami, which wrote the study.

Foreign-registered ships, the vast majority of commercial vessels in U.S. trade, must hire a state-registered harbor pilot when entering or leaving a Florida port.

Pilot fees are set by the state's Pilotage Rate Review Board. Florida's 98 pilots — 23 of them in Tampa Bay — belong to associations at each port. They pool fees and split what's left over after expenses. Associations decide when they need additional pilots, chosen by the highest scores in a state test.

A spokeswoman for the Florida Harbor Pilots Association called the study a smokescreen for the real goal of cruise lines and cargo shippers: to eliminate the state requirement to carry a pilot with knowledge of local waters.

"All they want is to increase their bottom line and disregard the safety of Florida ports," Sarah Bascom said.

Harbor pilots come to the job with eight to 12 years in the uniformed services or Merchant Marines and two or three years as a deputy pilot, she said.

Bascom said the study was timed to influence a review of licensing and pay for harbor pilots by the Legislature's Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability. The agency's findings are due to be released in December.