



Letter to the Editor: Harbor pilot program

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In calling for the modernization of Florida's harbor pilot system, cargo and passenger vessel operators are not suggesting the role of pilots be diminished ("Changes sought to harbor pilot program," Business, Oct. 21). Because safe navigation in and out of port is critical to our businesses, we are suggesting a more open structure where more harbor pilots can offer their services.

An open market system will allow competition to thrive, resulting in more jobs, government revenues and direct savings for consumers.

It is a good thing for all Floridians that the state is reviewing the current, outdated harbor pilot system. Today there are fewer than 100 state-licensed harbor pilots to guide thousands of ships in and out of port each year. Their monopolistic system has intentionally kept their numbers low and has allowed them to establish a non-competitive pay structure that pays them an average \$368,000 per year - far more than jobs with similar safety and stress concerns, such as air traffic controllers, airline pilots and ships' captains. By comparison, Tampa's police chief earns just more than \$144,000.

Ship operators appreciate and value the extra pair of eyes that harbor pilots offer, but the rates they charge should be more reasonable and comparable to other public safety professions. Opening the monopoly to competition is a long overdue, healthy first step.

- *MICHELE PAIGE, Pembroke Pines, the writer is president of the Florida Alliance of Maritime Organizations*