

**BEFORE THE WASHINGTON
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

**WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND
TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION,
Complainant,**

v.

**PUGET SOUND PILOTS,
Respondent.**

Docket TP-

**TESTIMONY OF
CAPTAIN DEBORAH D. DEMPSEY
ON BEHALF OF PUGET SOUND PILOTS**

JUNE 29, 2022

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I. IDENTIFICATION OF WITNESS

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Q: What is your name and address?

A: Captain Deborah D. Dempsey, 1123 14th St., Bellingham, WA 98225.

Q: Please describe your educational background.

A: I am a 1971 graduate of the University of Vermont where I majored in chemistry. In 1976, I graduated from the Maine Maritime Academy with a BS in nautical science. I was the valedictorian of my deck class and the first female graduate of any maritime or service academy in the history of the U.S.

Q: Please provide a summary of your work experience.

A: After graduating from Maine Maritime, I worked as a Third Mate for one year on an oil tanker operated by Exxon Co., USA. In 1977, I began a 17-year career with Lykes Bros. Steamship Co. While at Lykes, I was promoted to Second Mate, then to Chief Mate and lastly to Master in 1989. I served as the Captain of Lykes vessels in international trade for five years. In 1994, I was recruited to become a Columbia River Bar Pilot, a position in which I served for 22 years. I retired as a Bar Pilot in 2016. A copy of my CV is Exhibit DDD-02.

Q: Looking at your CV, you have a lengthy history of female "firsts" in US maritime history. Please list those firsts.

A: I was the first female in the following categories: first graduate of a US maritime academy; first female master on international voyages; first female captain delivering

1 military supplies in a war zone (Persian Gulf War); and first female pilot serving as a
2 Columbia River Bar Pilot.

3
4 **Q: While you were a Captain with Lykes Bros. Steamship Co., did you have an
5 experience that was written up in *Parade Magazine*?**

6 A: Yes. In July 1994, *Parade* ran an article telling the story of how I led the rescue of the
7 M/V Lyra off the coast of North Carolina. I was the Captain of this ship in 1989-90 and made
8 six trips to and from the Persian Gulf in support of Operation Desert Storm. Following the
9 Persian Gulf War, the US government bought the ship from Lykes to address the need for
10 Ro-Ro type ships (roll-on/roll-off) in their Ready Reserve Fleet. Rather than delivering the
11 ship from Baltimore to New Orleans under her own power with a crew, the company thought
12 it could save some money by towing the ship. On January 26, 1993, in 50-knot winds and 20-
13 foot seas, the 634-foot Lyra broke her tow wire 50 miles off Cape Fear, North Carolina. With
14 387,000 gallons of fuel, no power and no crew, this dead ship was drifting toward Frying Pan
15 Shoals with no way to stop her.
16

17 I had just gotten home to Virginia and had not unpacked yet when my boss called and
18 asked me to helicopter out to the ship and attempt to stop her drift by deploying two anchors,
19 something I had never done in my seagoing career. I agreed and headed to the airport to meet
20 three other crew members. The plan was to deliver each of us by helicopter, lowered down to
21 the deck in a basket. This turned out to be the worst part because these maneuvers had to be
22 accomplished with the ship wallowing in the trough doing 35-degree snap-rolls. As I was
23 lowered to the deck, I remember thinking: "There's nothing blacker than a ship dead in the
24 water in a storm at night." We managed to lower the first anchor, but then the emergency
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1 generator failed. This left us without the hydraulic power needed to deploy the second
2 anchor. Fortunately, we were able to let go of that second anchor using a manual back-up
3 system. After eight hours of drifting toward the shoals and a potential major oil spill, the first
4 anchor dug into the ocean floor just 24 miles off the coast, and the ship stopped moving
5 shoreward. Had we not stopped her drift, she would not have survived the night. This rescue
6 eventually received every conceivable maritime award, and a banquet was held to honor the
7 entire crew. A copy of the *Parade Magazine* article is Exhibit DDD-03.

8 9 10 **II. PURPOSE OF TESTIMONY.**

11 **Q: What is the purpose of your testimony?**

12 A: I truly enjoyed my maritime career. It was both challenging and tremendously
13 rewarding. When I started, it was tough for a woman on the bridge of a ship, but if you
14 worked hard, ignored the discriminatory comments and persevered, you could be successful.
15 My book, "*The Captain's A Woman*," chronicles the different forms of discrimination I
16 experienced in my first several years as a deck officer. One of the reasons that I wrote the
17 book was to spread the word to young women about the extraordinary possibilities of a
18 maritime career. Since publishing that autobiography in 1997, I have continued supporting
19 efforts to diversify the US maritime industry and the pilotage profession in this country. In
20 2005, while still working, I was able to move to Bellingham, where I helped found a
21 nonprofit boating organization called the Bellingham Bay Community Boating Center and
22 became involved in the Washington Board of Pilot Commissioners' Diversity, Equity and
23 Inclusion Committee. The goal of the DEIC is to "promote, establish, and maintain a pilot
24 corps that reflects the people of Washington State by increasing diversity among state-
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licensed marine pilots.” *Diversity Program*, Board of Pilotage Commissioners,
1 <https://pilotage.wa.gov/diversity--equity---inclusion.html>.

2
3 The purpose of my testimony in this proceeding is to describe the various ways that I
4 have assisted young women (and men) interested in pursuing a maritime career, to share my
5 observations of the impressive efforts of the Puget Sound Pilots over many years to diversify
6 their pilot group and to provide my opinions on both why a diversified pilot corps is
7 important to maximizing the casualty-prevention function of a pilotage system and how to
8 accelerate PSP’s diversification effort through rate-related decisions by the Washington
9 Utilities and Transportation Commission.
10

11
12 **Q: Can you provide an example of how you have assisted a young woman pursuing**
13 **a career in the maritime industry?**

14 A: Yes, and I will use Captain Sandy Bendixen, the first female pilot licensed in
15 Washington, as my example. In 2002, the president of Maine Maritime Academy called to
16 tell me that one of their midshipmen, Sandy Bendixen, was from the Pacific Northwest and
17 would be interested in meeting me and having an opportunity to accompany me on a pilotage
18 assignment. I called her and told her to come out to Astoria and I would arrange for her to
19 ride along with me on a pilotage assignment during my next two-week on-duty period. She
20 came out, stayed with me and got some good experience on the pilot ladder, riding along
21 with me directing vessels crossing the Columbia River Bar inbound from the Pacific Ocean
22 to Astoria or outbound from Astoria to sea. I then set her up with a similar opportunity with
23 Captain Anne McIntyre, the first woman licensed to pilot ships on the Columbia and
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1 Willamette River pilotage ground, which runs from Astoria to ports on the Columbia and
2 Willamette Rivers.

3
4 **Q: Why do you consider a diversified pilot corps important to the safety-first
5 function of a pilotage system?**

6 A: In my opinion, a highly diversified pilot corps is critically important to the capacity of
7 a pilot group to function consistently at a "zero accidents" level. In my experience, because a
8 maritime pilot is regularly boarding a ship that he or she has never operated, it is impossible
9 to teach a pilot every circumstance that might arise with a given ship type (tanker, bulker, car
10 ship, container ship or cruise ship) encountering an infinite variety of wind, wave, current or
11 close quarters conditions. I know from experience that it is the diversity of a pilot corps—the
12 range of ship types, work experience on seagoing vessels (often referred to as bluewater
13 experience), towboats (often referred to as brownwater experience) or ferries, and ship
14 handling experience in US waters and around the world—that is critically important to
15 maintaining the pilotage skill throughout a pilot group at the highest possible level.
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18 It is well known throughout the pilotage profession that one serious casualty could
19 well be the end of your career. It is no surprise to me that the Washington Legislature
20 adopted a "zero spills" goal in 2004 and that the purpose of compulsory pilotage on
21 Washington waterways is to "prevent the loss of human lives, loss of property and vessels,
22 and to protect the marine environment of the state of Washington." RCW 88.16.005. In my
23 view, for a pilot group to provide the "best available protection" against casualties involving
24 vessels under pilotage, the pilot corps must draw its pilots from diverse backgrounds, each
25 one of whom then furthers the education and pilotage skills of all members of the pilot corps.
26

1 In addition, I strongly believe that diversity extends beyond the particulars of a pilot's work
2 history and experience. In my opinion and experience, the pilot group is also enhanced by
3 gender and racial diversity because pilotage challenges such as how best to handle
4 hypothetical emergency situations or challenging maneuvers in close quarters are vetted
5 more thoroughly when the group examines the issue from a wide range of perspectives and
6 analytical approaches to problem solving.

7
8 **Q: From the standpoint of compensation and benefits, if a pilot group seeks to be**
9 **competitive in attracting women and minorities as applicants to their pilotage ground,**
10 **what do you believe is necessary?**

11
12 A: I try to stay in touch with these issues throughout the United States by regularly
13 participating in maritime career outreach opportunities to women and minorities. My regular
14 participation in "Women on the Water" conferences throughout the country are listed on my
15 CV. In the last 15 years, I participated in over a dozen of these conferences as a participant
16 or a speaker. I'm also in regular contact with female pilots around the country and from time
17 to time provide counsel to young women and men as well who are considering a pilotage
18 career. In my opinion, there are two components to a successful effort to increase the number
19 of female and other minority pilots. First, the pilot group itself must embrace and support the
20 importance of a diverse pilot corps. On this front, the Puget Sound Pilots are clearly a
21 national leader as demonstrated by the length of time and scope of the effort that PSP has
22 been making to interest young women and minorities in considering a maritime career that
23 ultimately could lead to entering the pilotage profession. Second, to attract qualified women
24 and minority pilot applicants, a pilot group must offer a package of compensation and
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1 benefits that is comparable to that of other major pilot groups in the US. Specifically, this
2 means a competitive net income level, full tariff funding of insurance benefits including
3 medical/dental insurance, disability insurance and license defense insurance as well as a
4 pension plan that delivers a reasonably robust pension, taking into account that pilot
5 candidates must make a mid-career move to become a pilot. Personally, I spent 18 years at
6 sea and then 22 years as a pilot.

7
8 **Q: With respect to recruiting female candidates for pilot positions, do you agree**
9 **with Chief Mate Alysia Johnson that offering a generous maternity leave benefit has**
10 **strong potential to significantly decrease the level of attrition among female deck**
11 **officers working aboard oceangoing vessels or domestic towboats?**

12
13 A: Yes. I agree with Chief Mate Johnson on two points. First, a young woman with the
14 credentials that she will have at the 12- to 15-year stage of her career will have her pick of
15 pilot groups to apply to. Mariners of her caliber are part of a national pool where competitive
16 compensation and benefits will have a substantial impact on where a given candidate
17 ultimately lands. I know Houston pilot Sherry Hickman quite well and understand directly
18 from her that the relatively high pay earned by Houston Pilots played a major role in her
19 decision to apply to that pilot group. At this point, with three female pilots, the Houston
20 Pilots are among the leading pilot groups in the US in terms of their number of female pilots.
21 There can be little doubt that the compensation and benefits package plays a significant role
22 and any pilot group wishing to compete for those candidates must be competitive on pay and
23 benefits. Second, for pilot groups to be successful in recruiting female pilots, the organization
24 must have a culture that is supportive of pilot diversity, which ultimately will be reflected in
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1 part by how the group addresses maternity benefits. To my knowledge, PSP is the first pilot
2 group in the US to formally adopt a maternity policy. This policy has only enhanced PSP's
3 reputation as a progressive pilot group that promotes diversity in its pilot corps. Most
4 significantly, I believe that the generous character of the PSP maternity leave policy will,
5 combined with a competitive package of pay and benefits, not only attract female pilots to
6 PSP in the near future, but also encourage other pilot groups to adopt similar policies. If that
7 happens, I agree with Chief Mate Johnson that this major move toward a more family-
8 friendly pilotage work environment has good potential to motivate young women mariners in
9 both blue-water and brown-water deck positions to pursue their careers for the 10 to 15 years
10 necessary to qualify for a pilotage position instead of terminating their careers earlier in order
11 to have a family. At this point, PSP is well-positioned to attract highly qualified female
12 candidates provided the tariff funding the Puget Sound pilotage system is increased to fund a
13 competitive package of compensation and benefits for PSP pilots. I urge the UTC to approve
14 the level of funding sought by PSP that I believe is clearly necessary to increase the level of
15 PSP's pilot corps diversity and, in turn, to maximize the casualty-prevention function of the
16 pilotage system serving Puget Sound.
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19 **III. CONCLUSION.**

20 **Q: Does this conclude your testimony?**

21 A: Yes.
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