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April 5, 2022

Dear Mayor & Members of the City Commission:

I am writing this letter because I will not be in town for today's meeting but wanted my well-earned opinion to be heard and considered as I have worked with cruise ships from the very beginning, back in the mid-80s.

Our cruise ship industry is not a recent occurrence. It took an enormous amount of labor, thought and funding, as well as participation by the Red Shawl Ladies, Coffee Butler and the Chamber of Commerce. It was something everybody wanted "back then". Back then was a time we were trying to get our feet back on the ground after the closing of the Navy Base and the Mariel Boatlift. They provided passengers eager to see our little island.

Personally, I have always seen the cruise ship passenger visitation as, not only a major part of our economic makeup, but also something most towns our size would want. Contrary to what we are hearing from SCS, the cruise ships today are clean and are standard bearers for environmental protection. What they are calling pollution is nothing more than mud that is being stirred up to a lesser degree than when we have winds from a certain direction which muddy the entire region. This is just not a valid point. In fact, the coral growth on Mallory Dock and behind the Aquarium is more abundant than it has ever been.

The other component of cruise ship visitations is the fact that it is self-promoting. People come here for a short period of time, enjoy it and go back and tell others about it. The hotels in Key West are enjoying one of their most productive seasons in history and much of that came from the impact of exposure to cruise ships.

Finally, and maybe more important, is the immediate economic impact that the loss of cruise ships will have. The income from disembarkation fees, security and money spent at retail stores and attractions has already gone away to a large degree and the impact is being felt by our local workforce.

I believe that you are trying to do your best to balance all sides of this issue, but I would urge you to consider the impact on the vast majority of our industry and its workers over those of snowbirds who live here part of the year to take advantage of Florida's tax laws.

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Thank you for your kind consideration and, as always, thank you for your service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Chris Belland". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "C".

Chris Belland
Chief Executive Officer

CB/na