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**Media Contact:
Eric Brazer, Deputy Director
(919) 451-1971
eric@shareholdersalliance.org**

Legislation Signed into Law to Support Young Fishermen with Tools and Training to Succeed

*Gulf Commercial Fishermen Cheer Implementation of the
Young Fishermen's Development Act to Ready the Next Generation*

GALVESTON, TX – Commercial fishermen throughout the Gulf of Mexico cheered this morning as they woke up to the news that the Young Fishermen's Development Act – our nation's first training program for the next generation of commercial fishermen – was signed into law yesterday by President Trump. The good news comes on the heels of one of the most challenging years in recent history, as the COVID-19 global health pandemic shuttered restaurants and squeezed commercial fishermen to an economic and emotional breaking point.

“Many of us have worked for decades to protect fish stocks and build strong seafood businesses and it is great to see Congress come together to support the next generation of fishermen,” said Captain Buddy Guindon, Executive Director of the Shareholders' Alliance and owner-operator of the f/v Hull Raiser in Galveston, Texas. “The Young Fishermen's Development Act will help make sure there's a crop of young, hardworking men and women who are ready to carry this torch and continue the proud tradition of providing food security to feed our great nation.”

The Young Fishermen's Development Act will establish a \$2,000,000 annual competitive grant program to support initiatives to educate, train, and mentor young fishermen in critical areas of expertise like business planning, bookkeeping, vessel operations and safety, the complex world of fisheries regulations. Both the House version ([H.R. 1240](#)) and the Senate version ([S. 496](#)) passed unanimously in recent weeks in a rare showing of bipartisan and bicameral support.

The Fishing Communities Coalition, representing small boat commercial fishermen all over the country, first proposed the idea in 2015 and has been working doggedly since then to secure passage of the bill.

“The Fishing Communities Coalition saw that this kind of program existed for farmers and ranchers but not for fishermen, and set out to fix that,” said Captain Bobby Kelly, owner-operator of the Miss Brianna in Orange Beach, Alabama. “We worked with commercial fishermen from Texas to Florida to Maine to Alaska for more than half a decade to make this happen. I’m proud to be part of the organization that helped get it done and want to personally thank Senator Doug Jones and his staff for their support of this bill.”

“The local fish I catch and deliver to restaurants all over New Orleans puts local food on local people’s plates and smiles on their faces,” said Lance Nacio, commercial shrimp fisherman and owner of Anna Marie Shrimp Company in Montegut, Louisiana. “Now, more than ever, we need more young people with strong skills in this business so fresh, wild seafood can rise up and continue to be a part of the culture and tradition of Louisiana. I’m grateful to Congressman Richmond for supporting a program that will help promote Louisiana’s seafood future.”

The “graying of the fleet” is a national phenomenon - the average age of commercial fishermen in most regions of the country is increasing, and in the Gulf of Mexico, 40% of commercial fishermen are over 55 years old. Different areas and organizations have developed unique grassroots programs to support and train the next generation of commercial fishermen, including the launch of the Gulf Young Fishermen’s Program in the Gulf of Mexico earlier this year and the [Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Quota Bank](#) – a community allocation program supporting next generation of commercial fishermen since 2015. The Young Fishermen’s Development Act would be the first national-level piece of legislation that’s focused on ensuring we are training the next generation of commercial fishing workforce.

“You can’t think of Florida without thinking of seafood - we land more stone crab, spiny lobster and groupers than any other state in this country,” said Justin Bruland, commercial fisherman from Marathon, Florida, and Planning Team member of the Gulf Young Fishermen’s Program. “We need a rugged fleet of young guys and women to work their way into commercial fishing, and the Young Fishermen’s Development Act will help make that happen. Thank you, Congressman Lawson and Congressman Soto, for supporting the fishing leaders of tomorrow.”

The Shareholders’ Alliance would like to thank the tireless efforts of the bill’s cosponsors – Senator Sullivan (R-AK), Senator Cantwell (D-WA), Senator Murkowski (R-AK), Senator Collins (R-ME), Representative Young (R-AK), Representative Radewagen (R-AS), Representative Moulton (D-MA), Representative Golden (D-ME), and Representative Pingree (D-ME) – and our Gulf leadership for endorsing this bill and the next generation of fishermen it supports.

For more information on how the Shareholders’ Alliance is working to support the next generation of commercial fishermen, visit our Young Fishermen’s webpage [here](#).



Conner Cochrane, from Galveston, Texas, meets Representative Huffman (D-CA) at the Fishing Communities Coalition annual "Fish Tales" event in Washington, DC.



Shan Roper Jr., from Steinhatree, Florida, meets Representative Yoho (R-FL).

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The Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance is the largest organization of commercial grouper and snapper fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico. We represent the interests of commercial fishermen and other stakeholders who want to bring sustainability and accountability to fisheries management, in addition to engaging in a variety of fisheries support and philanthropic endeavors.