Memorandum of Support
A4075 (McDonald) and S3790 (May)

The Preservation League of New York State is New York’s statewide historic preservation nonprofit. **We write in support of Bills A4075 and S3790 relating to recognizing the Tugboat Urger as the Official Tugboat of the State of New York.**

As New York State’s only statewide historic preservation nonprofit organization, the Preservation League invests in people and projects that champion the essential role of preservation in community revitalization, sustainable economic growth and the protection of our historic buildings and landscapes. We lead advocacy, economic development and education programs across the state and partner with local preservation organizations throughout New York.

In July of 2018, The Preservation League learned of the intention to relocate Tug Urger to a dry land exhibit off the NYS thruway at the Lock 13/Taste of NY Visitor Center. As a result, the League began a campaign to bring attention to the historic importance of the National Register-listed vessel and advocate for a preferable solution that honors this important asset in Erie Canal and New York State history.

Built in 1901, Urger is one of the oldest operable tugboats in the country and was purchased by the NYS Barge Canal in 1922. Urger moved dredges, barges and scows primarily on the Champlain Canal and Eastern portion of the Erie Canal, from 1922 through 1986, when she retired from heavy work. She returned to active service in 1991 and for the next 25 years served as flagship and traveling ambassador for the New York State Canal System.

Referred to as the beloved “teaching tug,” Urger hosted over 100,000 students on school field trips over a 25-year period. Urger was the focus of educational programs, historical interpretation and celebrations in canal-side communities across upstate New York and in ports from New York Harbor to the Canadian border and west to the Great Lakes.
Listed on National Register of Historic Places in 2001 for her long and historic association with the development of New York State’s twentieth-century canals and as a representative of evolving twentieth-century marine technology. Urger’s significance is derived from her lengthy career of canal operation as well as her service to communities across New York State as an educational tool. Urger is also a rare surviving example of a "bell boat" with a direct-reversing engine.

The New York State Canal System was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2016 due to its span, scope and historic integrity. The historic vessels related to the NYS Canal System (including Tug Urger) are a significant component of the system’s integrity. The National Historic Landmark designation recognizes the importance of the canal fleet and canal vessels to the New York State Canal System.

Recognizing the Tug Urger as the Official Tugboat of the State of New York will bring attention to this vessel’s historic significance and allow all stakeholders to determine the best way to celebrate this piece of canal history in New York State.