

Bilirakis Biometrics Measure Adopted to House-Passed Coast Guard Authorization

WASHINGTON (Apr. 24) — On Thursday, the U.S. House of Representatives adopted an amendment to the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2008 (H.R. 2830) authored by Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis (R-Fla.) that would require the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) to formalize and expand a pilot program for the mobile biometric screening of aliens interdicted in the maritime environment.

The Amendment, which the House adopted by a voice vote, would also set a date certain for the program to be enacted, and would require the Guard to provide a cost analysis for a Coast Guard and DHS-wide deployment of the biometric collection program in the most appropriate manner.

"Since the collection of limited biometrics on individuals interdicted at sea began, the Coast Guard has collected biometric data from 1,513 migrants, resulting in nearly 300 matches against databases of wanted criminals, immigration violators, and others who have previously encountered government authorities," Bilirakis said during floor debate. "Instead of being released to repeat their dangerous and illegal behavior, these individuals are now detained and prosecuted."

H.R. 2830, which passed the House on Thursday, also contained several provisions strongly supported by Bilirakis. These included provisions to improve Coast Guard operations and mission support, such as creating new maritime response teams for rapid counterterrorism deployment, authorizing a waterways security program, bringing stricter oversight and accountability to the Coast Guard's Deepwater acquisition program for ships and aircraft, and increasing penalties for smuggling illegal aliens into the United States.

"This legislation will greatly enhance the safety and security of America's shorelines by ensuring that the Coast Guard has every tool at its disposal to protect America's maritime borders," said Bilirakis.