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Governor Pulaali'i Reaffirms Formal Request for Permanent U.S. Coast Guard Presence in American Samoa

PAGO PAGO, American Samoa — Governor Pulaali'i Nikolao Pula today reaffirmed that his administration has formally requested the establishment of a permanent United States Coast Guard station in American Samoa, including the deployment of Coast Guard cutters and personnel to operate from Pago Pago Harbor.

The statement responds to growing public concern over recent reports of narcotics trafficking and other transnational criminal activity across the Pacific region. Community members have rightly asked what concrete steps are being taken to further strengthen the protection of American Samoa — particularly given that the territory currently has only a small U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Detachment with no permanent vessel or cutter presence.

On August 7, 2025, Governor Pula formally submitted a detailed proposal to Captain Nicholas Worst, Commanding Officer of U.S. Coast Guard Sector Honolulu, requesting the establishment of a U.S. Coast Guard Station–American Samoa. The proposal was also provided to Congresswoman Uifa'atali Amata Coleman Radewagen, Lieutenant Governor Pulumataala Ae Ae Jr., and Port Administration Director Barney Sene.

The Governor's proposal specifically requested:

- The deployment of U.S. Coast Guard cutters and operational resources to American Samoa;
- A permanent Coast Guard station capable of supporting regional patrols;
- Maritime law-enforcement operations targeting illegal fishing and transnational criminal activity;
- Improved search-and-rescue and disaster-response capabilities;
- Protection of American Samoa's approximately 404,000-square-kilometer Exclusive Economic Zone;



- Coordination with federal and regional partners to strengthen maritime security throughout the South Pacific.

“The people of American Samoa deserve to know that their government has not remained silent or waited for a crisis before taking action,” Governor Pula said. “Nearly one year ago, we formally presented the United States Coast Guard with a comprehensive proposal for a permanent station, cutters, personnel and supporting infrastructure in American Samoa.”

Recent large-scale cocaine seizures across the Pacific demonstrate that international criminal organizations increasingly regard the region as a trafficking corridor. In January 2026 alone, authorities reported major seizures in Fiji and French Polynesia as part of an estimated multibillion-dollar regional drug trade. American Samoa participates with other Pacific jurisdictions through the Oceania Customs Organization in efforts to address transnational organized crime.

Although recent reports and social-media posts have understandably raised concern, the public is encouraged to rely on confirmed information from law-enforcement agencies and to report suspicious activity through the appropriate authorities rather than circulating unverified claims.

Governor Pula emphasized that a permanent Coast Guard presence would not replace the responsibility of territorial law-enforcement agencies. Instead, it would provide capabilities that a small island jurisdiction cannot independently maintain, including long-range maritime surveillance, offshore interception, specialized intelligence coordination and sustained patrols across an enormous ocean area.

“Drug trafficking, illegal fishing and other maritime threats do not begin at our shoreline,” the Governor said. “They move across thousands of miles of ocean. Meeting these challenges requires federal vessels, aircraft, intelligence and personnel positioned closer to the South Pacific—not thousands of miles away.”

The Governor noted that this assessment has also been reinforced through discussions with U.S. Coast Guard leadership. During a June 18, 2026, meeting with U.S. Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Kevin Lunday, the Commandant expressed strong interest in stationing a Coast Guard cutter in American Samoa. He recognized the Territory’s strategic importance, acknowledged the benefits of an enhanced Coast Guard presence in the South Pacific, and supported continued discussions as the proposal advances.



Part of a Broader Security Initiative

On July 9, 2026, following China's July 6 ballistic-missile test in the South Pacific, Governor Pula wrote directly to President Donald J. Trump urging the federal government to strengthen American Samoa as a forward-operating hub for maritime security, logistics, disaster response and regional stability. That letter specifically identified narcoterrorism and transnational criminal networks operating between South America and the wider Pacific as one of the four principal security challenges facing the region.

The United States confirmed that China conducted the July 6 test from a nuclear-powered submarine and expressed concern about the limited advance notice and broader implications of China's military development.

"The missile test and reports of increased narcotics trafficking may appear to be separate issues, but both demonstrate the same underlying reality: the South Pacific is changing, and American Samoa requires a sustained and visible federal presence," Governor Pula said. "Our request is not being made in response to a single headline. It is based on a careful assessment of the territory's long-term safety, security and strategic importance."

Governor Pula said the American Samoa Government will continue working with the U.S. Coast Guard, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of War, the Department of the Interior, Congresswoman Uifa'atali Amata and other federal partners to advance the proposal.

The Governor also acknowledged the work of Port Administration Director Barney Sene, whose department has assisted in identifying waterfront facilities, operational requirements and port infrastructure that could support a Coast Guard station and vessels in Pago Pago Harbor.

Timeline of Governor Pula's Efforts to Strengthen America's Presence in the South Pacific

August 7, 2025

Governor Pula formally submitted a proposal to the United States Coast Guard requesting the establishment of a permanent U.S. Coast Guard Station in American Samoa. The proposal called for the deployment of Coast Guard cutters and personnel, while offering waterfront property, housing sites, shipyard support, and other infrastructure necessary to establish a permanent operational presence in Pago Pago Harbor.



2025–2026

The Governor continued discussions with federal officials and policymakers regarding American Samoa's strategic importance in the Indo-Pacific, emphasizing maritime security, protection of the Territory's Exclusive Economic Zone, illegal fishing enforcement, search and rescue capabilities, disaster preparedness, and America's long-term strategic interests in the South Pacific.

June 18, 2026

Governor Pula met with U.S. Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Kevin Lunday to discuss stationing a Coast Guard cutter in American Samoa. The Commandant acknowledged the Territory's strategic importance and expressed support for continued discussions on the proposal.

July 9, 2026

Following China's long-range ballistic missile test into the South Pacific, Governor Pula wrote to President Donald J. Trump urging increased federal investment in American Samoa's strategic infrastructure and security capabilities. The letter highlighted growing concerns over illegal fishing, narcotics trafficking, regional instability, and the need for a stronger and more visible American presence in the Pacific.

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