

## Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk and Mystic Aquarium

### Testimony Before the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut State Legislature

#### **H.B. No. 5005: AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021**

February 11, 2020

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk and Mystic Aquarium. First, on behalf of both institutions, we express our appreciation to the Committee, to the General Assembly and to the Governor for the financial support that we each have received in the past; it has been vital to our organizations and to the communities which we serve.

Governor Lamont's proposals to revise the existing budget for the next fiscal year, which are contained in HB 5005 do not seek to alter the appropriations that are anticipated to be made in FY 2021 to The Maritime Aquarium or to Mystic Aquarium. Together, we are here tonight to voice our support for the continuation of these important and vital appropriations.

Jointly, these institutions play a unique role in the state and serve as engines of the Connecticut tourism economy. In addition, they are the primary providers of essential science education to almost every school district in the state, and serve as the state's primary sentinels in protecting our most precious natural and economic resource, Long Island Sound, and the animals that are essential to its vitality:

- These two aquariums attract over 1,250,000 people on average every year;
- These visits bolster local, regional and state economic activity. In fact, the two institutions contribute \$114 million directly to the Connecticut economy;
- The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk and Mystic Aquarium are the primary economic engines for Connecticut's tourism industry. Over 60% of Mystic Aquarium's visitors and almost 40% of The Maritime Aquarium's visitors are from out-state. In addition to the \$114 million in economic impact they generate, more than 1,730 jobs are directly dependent upon both institutions;
- The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk and Mystic Aquarium, working cooperatively, focus particularly on education programs related to Long Island Sound and other ocean environments that bring inquiry-based science learning to over 300,000 young students each year, with particular attention paid to inner-city districts, where the riches of an institution like our Aquariums are often not part of family life, and where excellent

science instruction is needed more than ever in a state with the largest achievement gap in the nation; and

- Both institutions play a critical role in the protection of Long Island Sound.

The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk and Mystic Aquarium are essential economic engines for Connecticut. Other communities and states will look to build these kinds of institutions to spur economic development; we are seeking sustained, reliable state support so that we can continue to drive economic activity. The requested investment in these two institutions is critical. It is no small matter that both institutions are seeing other previously reliable sources of revenue eliminated.

The General Assembly's budget that was adopted last session and the Governor's bill before you recognizes the important roles that each of our institutions play. We understand the State continues to face significant financial challenges in the future, and we, like many others, have experienced reductions in these appropriations in the past. This evening, we stand together in our request to maintain our directed Line Items of support and allow us to effectively and responsibly manage those funds for the betterment of the State and your constituents.

Thank you for your attention.