



Testimony of CT Fund for the Environment, and its program Save the Sound

In Favor of Proposed H. B. No. 6103 AN ACT CONCERNING INVESTMENT IN LONG ISLAND SOUND INDUSTRIES Before the Commerce Committee

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Save the Sound is a regional program dedicated to the restoration and protection of Long Island Sound; together with its parent organization, Connecticut Fund for the Environment ("CFE"), a statewide non-profit environmental advocacy organization, it represents over 6,500 members. Since 1978, CFE has used law, science and education to improve Connecticut's environment.

Save the Sound, a program of Connecticut Fund for the Environment submits this testimony in *general support* of Proposed HB 6103, An Act Concerning Investment in Long Island Sound Industries. While enhancements to Long Island Sound's lobster and oyster industry has great potential to reinvigorate businesses critical to the state's economy, we understand that the Department of Economic and Community Development is already trying to do much work with scarce resources. While supportive of the general effort, it is our hope that the funds referenced in Proposed H. B. No. 6103 will supplement existing programs, not supplant them.

Long Island Sound is vital to Connecticut, providing \$8 billion to the regional economy. This is based on an economic analysis completed by the University of Connecticut a decade ago, updated to 2009 dollars. That study identified the economic benefits derived from our coastal industries that in turn are dependent on a healthy Long Island Sound. These industries include boating and associated marinas, recreational and commercial fishing and traditional oystering and lobstering as well as eco-tourism. The Sound is a vibrant and well used body of water that faces

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many challenges. Low oxygen levels threaten wildlife survival every summer, critical coastal habitats are dying, and stormwater pollution closes acres of shellfish beds and numerous beaches each year. Connecticut has recognized what we stand to lose, and has fought time and time again to protect this estuary from harm. However, the time to be proactive is upon us.

In an effort to highlight the benefits that investing in Long Island Sound can provide during times of economic trouble, the Long Island Sound Study's Citizen's Advisory created a package of capital spending that would both improve the health and accessibility of the Sound and create jobs for the future. It consists of stimulus investments in clean water projects, habitat and land preservation projects, restoration of the oyster and lobster industry, and improving coastal access. Each will simultaneously contribute to improved environmental health and the creation of new and much needed jobs. Of particular interest today is the portion of the package pertaining to the state's shellfish industry.

The Sound's oysters are world renowned and its lobster industry was a once thriving boon to the region. With a fairly modest investment of \$5.1 million, Connecticut can bolster its traditional maritime heritage by re-create 200 private oystering jobs and growing the highly successful lobster v-notch program.

Lobsters:

The Lobster V-notch program is an integral part of a long term lobster conservation effort for the Sound. Half of the investment provided in previous years, \$600,000 for each of FY '10 and '11, will keep the program afloat, allowing 13 lobster boats to continue working in a collaborative effort with high school students from three regional aquaculture schools.

Oysters:

With \$4.5 million in bonding for the Department of Agriculture's oyster restoration program we have the opportunity to create restoration of our traditional oyster beds, and set the stage for the industry to grow from the current \$5 million per year at least four fold. This would create 200 new private oystering jobs in Connecticut by restoring the seed beds that support our private oystering industry. Our world famous oysters require careful cultivation to be successful. That cultivation depends on a seed oyster beds having clean shell called "cultch" on which the baby oysters attach and grow. The last time we invested in clean cultch (early 1990's) the investment yielded oyster harvest worth approximately \$25 million in today's dollars. Disease outbreaks have now under control. The Sound and our oyster industry are poised to rebound. This investment plan calls for an investment in suction boats to collect the now sediment covered oyster shell, a public-private storage unit where the shell would be cleaned and re-processed and then returned to the oyster beds.

In conclusion, Long Island Sound is one of the most densely populated waterbodies in the country, with nearly 1/10th of the U.S. population living within 50 miles of its shoreline. While tremendous progress has been made in improving the health of the Sound, major long term investment is needed to meet both environmental objectives and improve the Sound's economic vitality. A relatively small amount of funding for the Sound's lobster and oyster industries will bolster the economy, create new jobs, and put the estuary back on track towards a sustainable future. It is for this reason, that we urge you to support Proposed HB 6103, An Act Concerning Investment in Long Island Sound Industries.

