Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk and Sea Research Foundation
Mystic Aquarium – Institute for Exploration – Immersion Learning

Testimony Before the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut State Legislature

February 24, 2011

Good evening. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk and Sea Research Foundation, which operates Mystic Aquarium, Institute for Exploration and Immersion Learning. We want to express our appreciation for continued funding of these key institutions as reflected in the Governor's FY12 and FY13 budgets and in your reinstatement of funding in the FY10 budget last year. Jointly, these institutions play a unique role in the state and serve as engines of the Connecticut tourism economy. Together, they are the primary providers of essential science education to 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.

Connecticut's two aquariums attract and inspire over 1.225 million people every year by engaging them in consideration of life forms and ocean environments that cannot otherwise be observed by most people. These visits bolster local, regional and state economic activity. The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk and Sea Research Foundation in Mystic are <u>the</u> 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, which means that these visitors stay overnight, eat at restaurants, shop in local stores and buy gasoline in Connecticut, all major contributions to Connecticut state revenue. In addition to $114 million in economic impact they generate, more than 1,730 jobs are directly dependent upon both institutions.

The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk and Sea Research Foundation collaborate regularly on animal care, rescue and rehabilitation of animals and most particularly on education programs related to Long Island Sound. Together, we serve over 300,000 school children in the State of Connecticut, in every inner city and in nearly every school district.

Our education programs go directly into K-12 schools with hands-on learning activities correlated to the state's curriculum frameworks, live animals that inspire kids, after-school programs throughout the state, and numerous on-site programs at each institution that link students with scientists. We frequently bring kids out on

Connecticut's rivers, shores and waterways and to study in the State's most remarkable classroom, Long Island Sound.

Both institutions play a critical role in the protection of Long Island Sound. Mystic Aquarium is involved in rescuing and rehabilitating marine mammals, birds and other sea creatures, leading this effort not only in Long Island Sound but throughout New England. At Mystic Aquarium, a major research laboratory studies the health of marine mammals and is involved in exploring the correlation between marine animal health and human health issues. In Norwalk, The Maritime Aquarium's permanent exhibits focus exclusively on Long Island Sound. A long-term data monitoring project with several partners has been studying changes to the biodiversity of Long Island Sound. The Maritime Aquarium plays a leading role in the regional harbor seal census and participates actively in horseshoe crab monitoring. Both institutions sponsor public programming to engage people in cleaning, protecting and caring for Long Island Sound.

Over the past decade, both institutions have branched out to look for new revenue opportunities. The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk has an IMAX theater that attracts many repeat visitors. It introduces new exhibits as often as twice a year to drive attendance, and plans a major renovation in 2011, funded entirely with private money, to make it an even stronger voice for Long Island Sound. Sea Research Foundation has recently restructured its long-term debt, achieving debt forgiveness of up to $24 million and as part of that effort raising more than $6 million in donations for capital improvements and debt reductions. We will introduce several new exhibits this year aimed at increasing attendance.

Exhibits and facilities in Aquariums are complex. Maintaining living creatures under water requires expertise in life support systems and continuous operation of pumps, filtration systems and other complex entities. The care of animals, including endangered or threatened species, must always be of primary concern. Aquariums are a rare type of institution, with only about 15 such institutions in the United States, precisely because of their complexity. Frequently, Aquariums are built and supported by governmental entities in the United States as powerful engines for the redevelopment of local and regional economies. In fact, The Maritime Aquarium was built expressly to anchor redevelopment in South Norwalk, a very successful endeavor that has transformed a formerly blighted neighborhood and attracted $315 million in private development funds.

The requested investment in these two institutions is critical. Funding supports marketing efforts specific to the two institutions and the two regions of the state, which helps drive traffic to each of the two economic areas. We know that marketing tourist destinations is complex. It requires extensive messaging at the state, regional and

attraction level. Certainly over the last several years, we, among many others, have seen our level of appropriation be reduced in order to be part of the solution to the state budget challenges. We are grateful for the continued State support, even though it may be less, and we have responded accordingly making certain changes within our own operations and infrastructure to address adequately the budget predicament. The Governor's proposed investment of $531,525 for The Maritime Aquarium and $620,112 for Sea Research Foundation in Mystic will bring a demonstrated 80% return to the State of Connecticut in direct economic impact and continue to pay dividends in demonstrated improvement in the academic performance of Connecticut's school children. Both institutions are committed to using state funds to drive economic development; for advertising and marketing aimed at attracting tourism, and for support of educational programs benefiting nearly every child in Connecticut.

You have many difficult decisions before you. We appreciate your understanding and support, and that of Governor Malloy, in supporting these two institutions for the economic benefit that they bring, and also for the vital educational role that they play as essential providers of science education in every school district in the State of Connecticut.

Thank you.

SEA RESEARCH FOUNDATION
Mystic Aquarium – Institute for Exploration – Immersion Presents

AND

The Maritime Aquarium
AT NORWALK

ENGINES FOR TOURISM AND EDUCATION IN CONNECTICUT

ATTENDANCE

Mystic	750,000 visits
Maritime	475,000 visits
Total	1,225,000 visits

EDUCATION

Mystic	165,000 students
Maritime	150,000 students
Total	315,000 students

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Mystic	$72 million
Maritime	$42 million
Total	$114 million

JOBS

Mystic	1,335 jobs
Maritime	395 jobs
Total	1,730 jobs