

**Sea Research Foundation
Mystic Aquarium – Ocean Exploration Center and JASON Learning**

Testimony Before the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut State Legislature

**H.B. No. 5030, AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL
YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2015**

February 11, 2014

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Kane, Representative Miner and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of Sea Research Foundation, which operates Mystic Aquarium, Ocean Exploration Center and JASON Learning. I am here to respectfully request your support of those portions of the Governor's budget proposal that would provide much-needed, and much-appreciated, funding for our institution in the coming fiscal year as well as necessary resources for Statewide marketing. On behalf of Sea Research, we thank you for your generous support in the past and we respectfully request your support today and in the future.

Sea Research Foundation, and its divisions – Mystic Aquarium, Ocean Exploration Center and JASON Learning – plays a unique role in the state and serves as an engine of the Connecticut tourism economy. In addition, we are the primary provider of essential science education to almost every school district in the state, and serve as the state's primary sentinel in protecting our most precious natural and economic resource, Long Island Sound, and the animals that are essential to its vitality.

Mystic Aquarium attracts over 700,000 people on average every year by engaging them in consideration of life forms of Long Island Sound and ocean environments beyond that cannot otherwise be observed by most people. These visits bolster local, regional and state economic activity. In fact, based upon studies that have been conducted, we believe that our institution helps contribute \$72.2 million directly to the Connecticut economy. This includes a payroll of \$8.6 million for 275 employees who, in turn, pay local real estate, state and federal taxes, and who spend locally and serve as good neighbors.

Sea Research Foundation in Mystic is one of the primary economic engines for Connecticut's tourism industry. Over 60% of Mystic Aquarium's visitors are from out-of-state, which means that these visitors eat at restaurants, shop in local stores, buy gasoline in Connecticut and stay overnight, all major contributions to Connecticut state revenue, generating an estimated \$6.5 million a year in economic impact.

Sea Research Foundation focuses particularly on education programs related to Long Island Sound and other ocean environments that bring inquiry-based science learning to over 100,000 young Connecticut students each year, with particular attention paid to inner-city districts, where the riches of an institution like our Aquarium 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.

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 that link students with scientists. We frequently bring kids out on Connecticut's rivers, shores and waterways to study in the State's most remarkable classroom, Long Island Sound.

In fact, evaluations of our educational programs show significant academic gains for Connecticut school children, encouraging career exploration in the sciences, and contributing to long-term impact on science literacy and concern for the environment.

In addition, our institution plays a critical role in the protection of Long Island Sound. Mystic Aquarium is involved in rescuing and rehabilitating marine mammals 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.

Sea Research Foundation in Mystic is an essential economic engine for Connecticut. Other communities and states will look to build this kind of institution to spur economic development in a down economy; we are seeking sustained, reliable state support so that we can continue to drive economic activity. The requested investment in this institution is critical. It is no small matter that our institution, as well as others, is seeing other previously reliable sources of revenue eliminated.

The investment of \$589,106 for Sea Research Foundation in Mystic will continue to pay dividends in demonstrated improvement in the academic performance of Connecticut's school children. We 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.

We also strongly support the Governor's recommendation for funding for marketing the state. Mystic Aquarium, like other attractions and hotels in the state, achieved significant growth in visitors in 2013 due in large part to a renewed marketing effort at the state level. Funding for marketing the state returns revenues in the form of taxes at a significant level and spurs economic activity and job growth throughout the State.

Thank you for your attention.