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**Testimony**

**HB 5289: An Act Concerning the Establishment of the Connecticut Port Authority**

**Transportation Committee**

**February 28, 2014**

Good morning, Chairmen Maynard and Guerrera, Ranking Members Boucher and Scribner, and former fellow members of the Transportation Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of HB 5289.

I support this bill for both economic development and transportation reasons. I believe that developing the state's ports will stimulate business, improve the movement of freight, and reduce highway traffic congestion.

While Connecticut's deep water ports (Bridgeport, New Haven, and New London) represent significant economic assets, the state has not optimized their potential. This has been made very clear by Connecticut's Deep Water Port Strategy Study, which was commissioned by OPM and published in 2012. We also heard corroborating testimony during the 2013 session in an informational hearing organized by this Committee and Commissioner Redeker. Both the study and the presentations at the informational hearing highlighted the ports' economic potential and the importance of coordination, oversight, and marketing, as well as an investment plan.

Connecticut has a long and rich maritime tradition, but its deep water ports are not thriving. According to the 2012 study, imports have declined by 80% since 2006. While it is generally acknowledged that Connecticut's ports cannot compete with the region's larger ports, the study makes compelling arguments for their economic potential by identifying four opportunities for expansion of their existing activities, as well as four additional opportunities for new business. It makes specific recommendations for investments that would improve the ports' capacity and operations, and suggests revising their governance structure. One possible alternative it mentions is the creation of a port authority.

Connecticut is the only East Coast state without a state-level governance structure for its deep water ports. I believe that only such an umbrella structure can look beyond the needs of each individual port to develop a plan that will address capital investment, regulatory, marketing, and transportation infrastructure issues.

Ports cannot function in isolation. To attract and retain business and related revenues, they must be an integral part of local, regional, and global economies, and within an effective local transportation system. They also must operate as dynamic businesses themselves, rather than as static geographic destinations.

This is why leadership of the Commerce Committee is working on raising a bill that will support the economic development of our ports. It is also why several of us believe that it would be constructive to share with the Commerce Committee cognizance of this particular aspect of the port authority's activities, and I would ask respectfully that you consider this.

Last year, I introduced a similar bill which was passed by the Commerce Committee and strongly supported the proposal that subsequently emerged from your membership. I hope that we will be successful this year in passing legislation, and that we can help Connecticut move forward in optimizing these economic assets. I look forward to working with you.