

Testimony of Bruce Hyde of New London on Raised Bill 345) AN ACT CONCERNING THE WATER TAXI AT THE HERITAGE PARK IN THE TOWNS OF GROTON AND NEW LONDON before the Environment Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Raised Bill 345. From 1990 to 2008 I was the Director of Development and Planning for the City of New London. During that time I, along with many others from the city of New London and the city and town of Groton and the then CT Department of Environmental Protection worked long hours to establish the Thames Estuary Maritime Heritage Park as set out in PA 87-463. This effort was viewed as economic development project as well as the creation of a cultural attraction. The concept was to link together existing historic sites, state parks, museums and other attractions with a maritime theme to create a visitor experience that was greater than the sum of its parts. This concept included establishing a water taxi to ferry tourists and residents to multiple historic attractions including two state parks (Ft. Griswold and Ft. Trumbull), three lighthouses, the Submarine Force Museum, and historic sites in downtown New London and the city of Groton.

Last fall, a demonstration project proved the popularity of the water taxi service. During two weekends in September (including one very rainy day) over 4,000 people used the water taxi to shuttle between attractions in New London and the City of Groton. People love to get out on the water and this is a convenient way for individuals and families to do so. A continuation of the water taxi service will bring much needed tourism and foot traffic to two downtowns seeking to enhance their commercial base.

The announcement of the Coast Guard Museum in New London has sparked a renewed interest in the park and the unique historic story we can tell. What better way to promote the *Connecticut-Still Revolutionary* tourism campaign than by supporting an historic attraction that boasts two of the most recognizable names from the Revolutionary War--Nathan Hale and Benedict Arnold. An unparalleled variety of ships, from submarines to America's tall ship The Eagle, ferries to research vessels, fishing boats to tugs can be seen on the Thames River. There are few other places in the world where one can be part of a working waterfront with such a diversity of vessels.

This bill will promote tourism and economic development in the region and benefit the state as a whole. Your support is needed to move this project forward.

Thank you for your consideration.

1/29/2015