



## State of Connecticut

### HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

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#### Testimony

#### **SB 345 AN ACT CONCERNING THE WATER TAXI AT THE HERITAGE PARK IN THE TOWNS OF GROTON AND NEW LONDON.**

Environment Committee

February 23, 2015

Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis, Senator Chapin, Representative Shaban and colleagues of the Environment Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify in support of S.B. 345, *An Act concerning the water taxi at the Thames River Heritage Park in the towns of Groton and New London.*

The appropriation as outlined in the legislation would establish a water taxi service connecting heritage sites along the Thames River on weekends for the entire summer. Currently, park visitors rely on motor vehicles to get to and from the designated heritage sites; constraining their ability to visit every location in a day's trip. By increasing access to the parks and museums via water taxi, there would be little need to increase parking capacity; and current dockage at each heritage site accommodates most water vessels.

During the water taxi's pilot run for two weeks in September, businesses, restaurants, and smaller, niche museums saw increased revenues and foot traffic in downtown New London and Groton's Thames Street. Their only concern was that it was *only* going to be for two weekends. Local residents found themselves taking serendipitous trips to each location, yielding opportunities for enlightenment about the Thames River's history—such as the infamous burning of New London by America's most notorious traitor, Benedict Arnold, the Amistad's landing at the Custom House, launching the world's first nuclear submarine out of Groton, and learning about New London's bustling whaling past. Each trip was at near capacity, and surveys indicated that people clamored for more frequent service in the future.

The Thames River Heritage Park Steering Committee has worked tirelessly over the last year on legislation to establish the park and putting together the two-week pilot program, as well as working with the Yale Urban Design Workshop to develop the park's master plan. Never have I seen more cooperation and collaboration between the region's business leaders, elected officials, activists, residents, non-profit community on any single issue.

Most importantly, the Heritage Park can play a critical role in restoring a neighborhood at Fort Trumbull, augment the National Coast Guard Museum set to open in 2018 which will serve as a catalyst for downtown renewal, help revitalize Groton's Thames Street, and further educate our students on silent service's role in protecting our nation. If promulgated effectively, this innovative, proposed state park could serve as a model for maritime heritage sites across our nation. On a light note, CT's tourism's motto, "Still Revolutionary," flawlessly sets the framework for the park that would require very little resources compared to traditional state parks.

America's story runs deeply in our soil, and we'd be remised to omit that history. The water taxi can stitch together the missing links of that story – and it's our role to share it. I respectfully ask you to support this legislation.