

Senate Environment Committee  
Public Hearing on S.B. No. 866  
An Act Concerning the Leasing of Lighthouse Bottomlands  
February 13, 2015

Good Morning, my name is Robert Zarnetske. I am the Regional Administrator for the United States General Services Administration here in New England (“GSA”).

I want to thank Chairman Kennedy, Chairman Albis, and the members of the Environment Committee for the opportunity to speak to you today about Senate Bill No. 866 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE LEASING OF LIGHTHOUSE BOTTOMLANDS.

GSA, in cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), and the National Park Service, administers a program to ensure the preservation of the nation's historic lighthouses. Established by the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000 (NHLPA), the program allows for historic light stations to be transferred at no cost to local communities, public entities and nonprofits (“Stewards”) for educational, historical and cultural purposes. In the event that no stewards are recommended by DOI, GSA may proceed to sell the lights via public sale. Whether the Lights are transferred to stewards or private purchasers at auction, the deeds provided by GSA contain historic preservation covenants as well as easements to allow USCG access to the lights, since most remain active federal aids to navigation.

Since 2000, GSA has deeded more than 100 historic lights in coastal communities on the East and West Coasts, the Great Lakes and Puerto Rico. We are pleased to see Connecticut join the list of coastal states revitalizing local maritime history with new stewards and owners of historic Lights. Two Connecticut lights, that are located on land, have been conveyed under the program: New London Harbor Light and the New London Ledge Maritime, both of which were transferred to the New London Maritime Society

There are five off shore lighthouses in Connecticut waters that GSA will seek to transfer in the next few years, including Greens Ledge Light, Peck Ledge Light, Penfield Reef Light, Saybrook Breakwater Light, and Southwest Ledge Light.

Recently, GSA conducted an auction for the sale of the iconic Saybrook Breakwater Light. The lighthouse, which was built in 1886, was sold to a private party who was scheduled to take possession on or about September 30, 2013. That sale could not be completed however because the purchaser was unable to obtain a lease for the land on which the Light sits, in accordance with the terms of the NHLPA.

As you may know, a previous sale of the offshore Penfield Reef Light in Bridgeport/Fairfield was also voided by the purchaser’s inability to negotiate a bottomlands lease with the State. The failure of that sale has resulted in a significant deterioration of Penfield Reef Light. With sequestration further constraining the federal

government's ability to do more than minimal maintenance, it is more important than ever to transfer these structures to suitable stewards or responsible and capable private owners.

We have worked closely with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and stand ready to continue to do so to facilitate the preservation of Connecticut's Lighthouses. Senate Bill 866 would authorize DEEP to lease the bottomlands beneath the Lighthouses I described above and thereby facilitate the transfer of title to the Lighthouses to stewards who promise to maintain and preserve these historic treasures, these icons of our maritime history.

I will be happy to answer any further questions the Committee members may have on this matter. I can be reached at 617-565-5860.