

## **Testimony to the Joint Legislative Committee on the Environment**

### **Regarding Raised Bill 5341 An Act Prohibiting the Sale and Breeding of Certain Cetaceans**

My name is Courtney Assad and I reside at 110 West Broad Street, Pawcatuck. As a resident of the Mystic for my entire childhood and program coordinator at the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut, I have developed a strong appreciation of Mystic Aquarium, their extensive community education programs, and the vital research they conduct that informs global conservation efforts.

I am testifying in opposition to Raised Bill 5341.

Mystic Aquarium, a recognized and accredited research facility, contributes profoundly to our understanding of whales through their work with belugas. As the population of cetaceans around the world rapidly declines, their research on this endangered species can help to reverse those trends. Examination of the pregnancy and gestation in a controlled environment is important to increasing knowledge of belugas and other cetaceans which can be applied to improve reproductive outcomes in wild populations.

Also, Mystic Aquarium is uniquely equipped to conduct this research. The aquarium has the largest outdoor habitat for belugas in the United States and they have built a team of leading experts and scientists who work with the University of Connecticut. The facility is strongly supported by the community, the state and research grants. This depth of support, type of facility, and research team has been built over decades. It should be allowed to continue in its purpose to expand our understanding of the ocean's inhabitants at this critical time in their survival.

Sustained research on endangered animals is essential to their protection in the wild. Bill 5341 seeks to effectively end cetacean research at Mystic Aquarium by preventing their natural reproduction. I am devastated by the thought of a world without whales—the sad outcome if we are not actively intervening on their behalf. Continued research is the key to successful strategies.

I strongly urge you to reject Bill 5341. It does not help cetaceans, but actually hinders our ability to affect positive change on behalf of whales.