

Commerce Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5243 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE GREATER

Title: MYSTIC AREA.

Vote Date: 3/17/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/24/2026

File No.: 314

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Commerce Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill exists to allocate financial resources towards further developing the greater Mystic Area, which is made up of the towns of Groton and Stonington. The greater Mystic Area exists as one of the economic powerhouses of the state of Connecticut, with a bolstering tourism economy. The area is regularly traversed with individuals interested in patronizing the aquarium, hotels, restaurants, local shops, and a myriad of other local businesses.

This bill requires the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) to utilize funds towards economic development activities in the greater Mystic area including; traffic mitigation, developing or improving docks, piers and breakwaters; constructing, renovating or improving parking garages, establishing a shuttle boat service; and establishing or improving existing riverwalks.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE: (AS SHOWN IN LCO 3350)

Added that a working group will be established to create a plan for economic development and tourism in the greater Mystic area. This plan will examine the potential federal, state or other sources of funding for the restoration of any breakwater located in 6 Stonington Harbor, transportation options to ease traffic congestion and alleviate parking pressure, and infrastructure improvements.

This working group will be made up of the chairpersons and ranking members of the joint standing committee of the General Assembly with awareness of matters relating to

commerce, or their designees; the Commissioner of Economic and Community Development, or the commissioner's designee; the Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection, or the commissioner's designee; the Commissioner of Transportation, or the commissioner's designee; the Commissioner of Agriculture, or the commissioner's designee; the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, or the secretary's designee; the chief elected official of Groton, or the official's designee; the chief elected official of Stonington, or the official's designee; and anyone that the chairperson deems necessary that is knowledge in commerce. The administrative staff will be made up of individuals knowledgeable in commerce.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Mystic Aquarium, President & Chief Executive Officer, Susette Tibus](#) expresses support for H.B 5243, explaining that Mystic Aquarium itself attracts 800,000 guests with more than half of them traveling from out of state with many people visiting largely because of this aquarium. This visitation then extends to the rest of Mystic, into the broader community extending patronage to hotels, restaurants, local shops, and many more local businesses benefiting the economic ecosystem of the town overall. Tibus cites that this bill recognizes that investments must be made to the Greater Mystic Area overall, improvements made to infrastructure, transportation, public spaces, all directly result in strengthening the Greater Mystic area's economic position.

The following submissions express similar sentiments to President & Chief Executive Officer of the Mystic Aquarium, Susette Tibus:

[Mystic Aquarium, Senior Director of Government Affairs, Mike Finley](#)
[Mystic Aquarium, CFO, Koray Gurz](#)

[Connecticut Marine Trades Association, Legislative Chair, Bob Petzold](#) supports this bill largely due to its ability to provide financial assistance in the form of \$8 million in state bonds towards funding activities that will stimulate the economy of Groton and Stonington.

[Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce, President, Bruce Flax](#) writes in support of this bill, recognizing that Mystic serves as an introductory location for a significant portion of tourism the state of Connecticut receives. Flax believes that the Greater Mystic area has consistently delivered economically when publicly invested into.

[Stonington Harbor Management Commission, Elizabeth Gimple](#) submits testimony in support of this bill highlighting, the need for repair of one of three Stonington breakwaters. Gimple explains, that this breakwater is of extreme significance to the Stonington community as it protects local businesses on the east side shore including a number of water dependent enterprises and hospitality related industries that directly impact tourism, alongside 47 waterfront residences.

[Seaport Marine Mystic, Managing Partner, Harry Boardsen](#) submits testimony in support of this bill. As a business owner of the multi-generational family business, Seaport Marine,

Boardsen shares a deep connection to the economic success of the greater Mystic area. Combining the businesses projected growth and inclusion of newer experiences with this bill, which can further expand Mystic's tourism sector, will allow for economic success to flourish within the town by creating opportunity for new jobs, creating sustainable economic growth, generate new jobs, and attract increased tourism revenue for the state of Connecticut.

[Hiedenrich Hospitality Group, Executive Chef and Partner, David Standridge](#) writes in support of this bill explaining, that Mystic is home to a number of formidable businesses ranging from tourist attractions like the Mystic Aquarium, Mystic Seaport Museum and the comprehensive list of award winning restaurants and chefs. Alongside its booming tourism industry, Mystic is also home to thriving waterfront industries including commercial fishing, sustainable kelp, and shellfish farming. Despite these positives, Mystic is unable to take full advantage of its economy largely due to infrastructure difficulties, issues that this bill works to address.

[Mystic Seaport Museum, VP Watercraft Operations, Shannon McKenzie](#) testifies in support of this bill highlighting, that the bills efforts towards infrastructure development is of extreme necessity. McKenzie notes, that as participants in Mystic's thriving tourists' economy, Mystic Seaports intends to expand its operations into downtown Mystic but recognizes that more parking is needed in order to accommodate the ever-growing tourism industry the greater Mystic area.

[Market Reality LLC, Real Estate Broker, Judi Caracausa](#) submits testimony in strong support of this bill, expressing that as a business owner and real estate broker in the Mystic - Stonington area this bill has the ability to expand not only the economy of this town but the overall state of Connecticut. The Mystic - Stonington area already exists as a heavily trafficked area for tourists, with a strong entrepreneurial spirit, and strong returns on past public investments, this bill has the power to strengthen the already robust economy only further, with support given to the infrastructure, public amenities, and transportation the state is sure to see an increase in long term economic growth.

[Empire Fisheries, Owner/Operator, Joseph J. Gilbert](#) writes in support of this bill namely, due to its financial assistance in improving docks, piers, and breakwaters in the greater Mystic area. Stonington Harbor exists as Connecticut's only deepwater commercial fishing port making it a vital location for water-based industries across the state. Gilbert explains that due to its importance it is necessary that infrastructure receive stronger support in order to ensure the stability of docks, harbors and the overall economic activity.

The following testimony expresses similar sentiments highlighting similar concerns regarding the importance of Stonington's waterfront:

[SNEFLA, Secretary/Treasurer, Leslie Packer](#)
[Lyndsey Pyrke-Fairchild](#)
[Anonymous 18](#)

[Pop Over Eatery, Owner, Pamela Landry Paydos](#) submits testimony in support of this bill largely due to recognizing, that by creating parking infrastructure, improving waterfront,

docks, riverwalks and overall pedestrian connectivity this legislation works to strengthen the businesses located here. Investing into the revitalization of Mystic infrastructure directly translates into investing into the economy, making it important that the state continue to support the infrastructure in order to continue to see the areas success.

[Lattizori Development, Owner, David Lattizori](#) writes in support of this bill noting that the proposed improvement in infrastructure not only exists to improve the quality of daily operations for local business or residents of the greater Mystic area but also has the ability to increase property values and create construction jobs.

[SCSU, Graduate Student and Researcher, Lisa Brandes](#) submits testimony expressing enthusiasm on its focus on tourism infrastructure, however, still urging the committee to expand the functions of this bill. Brandes notes that in order to ensure long term success in the greater Mystic area a dedicated funding stream such as a Tourism Improvement District (TID) would be necessary. Entities such as TID's are responsible for managing the infrastructure of tourism hubs focusing on parking garages, tourist info offices, and public transportation meant to support tourists across multiple municipalities. Brandes suggests that southeast Connecticut become interconnected with the Mystic River area, the Thames River (New London/Groton/Norwich), and the two Casinos all becoming linked and managed by a single TID. Alongside this, transportation access is of the utmost importance with Brandes suggesting that the bill also focus on extending preexisting major forms of transportation such as the SLE rail service and New London's Ferry Terminal to Mystic.

[Morgan Yandow](#) writes in support of this bill highlighting that the greater Mystic area is recognized as one of Connecticut's most lively destinations both regarding tourism and economically. H.B 5243 works to enhance Mystics already existing charm, through its focus to reduce traffic congestion and expand public transportation the state of Connecticut is supporting the greater Mystic area and ensuring its economic strength.

[Allison Kiley Nasin](#) submits testimony emphasizing that due to Mystics ever growing tourism market improving infrastructure as outlined in the bill will allow the area to remain attractive to visitors and residents alike.

[Anonymous 19](#) writes to declare their support for H.B 5243 which supports Mystics infrastructure.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Enumaah Dadzie, Assistant Clerk

Date: 3/30/26