

Testimony of Christopher Howard Pickerell  
Marine Program Director, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County  
Before the House Committee on Natural Resources,  
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries  
On  
H.R. 5441, To reauthorize Long Island Sound Programs, and for other purposes.

January 18, 2023

Good morning, Chairman Bentz, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify. My name is Chris Pickerell and I am the Director of the Marine Program for Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County<sup>1</sup> on Long Island, New York.

I am here to provide testimony in support of H.R. 5441 to reauthorize Long Island Sound Study Programs.

Before I address the program however, I thought it would be helpful to provide a little background so you understand why I believe this bill is so important.

I was born and raised on Long Island, in a family that has worked on the water for generations. My father is a bayman, boat builder, and oyster farmer who worked in the harbors of Long Island's north shore, harvesting clams, to support our family. When I was very young, I spent many hours on his boats, mostly watching and sometimes helping. Through this experience, I gained a deep appreciation for, and a unique understanding of, our local waters.

However, by the time I was old enough to choose my own path, working on the water no longer offered the same opportunities it had for my father and grandfather. Instead of following in their footsteps, I decided to pursue a career in biology, so that I might be able to protect the same waters that had once sustained my family.

Long Island Sound is a 1,300 square mile body of water lying between the southern coast of Connecticut and the north shore of Long Island, running from Manhattan out to the CT/RI border. Its watershed encompasses 16,000 square miles spread across six states, with an asset value of approximately \$1 trillion.

The Sound is situated in the midst of one of the most densely populated areas of the United States: nearly 9 million people live within this watershed, millions flock there for

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<sup>1</sup> CCE Suffolk is a subordinate governmental agency with an educational mission that operates under a form of organization and administration approved by Cornell University as agent for the State of New York. It is tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The association is part of the national cooperative extension system, an educational partnership between County, State, and Federal governments. As New York's land grant university Cornell administers the system in this state. Each Cornell Cooperative Extension association is an independent employer that is governed by an elected Board of Directors with general oversight from Cornell. All associations work to meet the needs of the counties in which they are located as well as state and national goals.

recreation, and it is a critical transportation corridor for goods and people. Additionally, the Sound provides feeding, breeding, nesting, and nursery areas for diverse animal and plant life.

Managing an estuary of this size and complexity is a massive undertaking. Funding from the EPA supports a Management Conference consisting of a number of committees and workgroups made up of Federal, State, and local officials along with NGO partners and interested citizens. This structure brings stakeholders together to work towards a common goal set forth in a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan.

The CCE Marine Program participates in this work through various planning and grant-funded initiatives. As part of the cooperative extension system, our mission includes supporting local communities and small businesses through education, outreach, hands-on learning, as well as applied research projects that address emerging issues. The Long Island Sound Program helps us achieve this mission.

With this funding, we have worked on a number of important stakeholder-driven projects based on local needs. These have included water quality monitoring, debris removal, and habitat restoration, as well as supporting local farmers to introduce best management practices to protect the watershed.

One of the most interesting and successful of these, is the Unified Water Study, where we collaborated with over 25 other organizations and municipalities across the Sound. This initiative developed new protocols so groups throughout the region can collect comparable data on the health of bays and harbors – those same areas that once supported my family.

Another important initiative involves removing derelict lobster pots left behind after the collapse of the lobster fishery in 1999. With funding from the Long Island Sound Study, we have been able to remove more than 20,000 derelict lobster pots, to date. And as an added advantage, we hired local fishermen to take us out on their vessels, which helps keep them on the water.

Other important work has involved restoring coastal plant communities including seagrass and salt marsh habitats. These systems provide critical ecosystem services, including support for recreational and commercial fishing, while also protecting the shoreline from excessive erosion. In this way, our work supports both the natural environment and valuable shoreline infrastructure.

The common thread through all of this work, is the funding made available in the bill you are considering today. And it is important to note, that these grants require local matching funds and services that help leverage Federal dollars. This gives your investment an even greater impact.

My brief testimony touches on just a few reasons why it is important to reauthorize the Long Island Sound Study Program. If you need more proof, I ask that you please look at the information contained in the links I have included in my written testimony. In these, you will find a more complete, and detailed list of the Program's many accomplishments.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Please see the following links for additional information about the Long Island Sound Study Program:

<https://longislandsoundstudy.net/>

[https://longislandsoundstudy.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/liss\\_sound\\_matters\\_fall\\_2023\\_issue.pdf](https://longislandsoundstudy.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/liss_sound_matters_fall_2023_issue.pdf)

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