



Save the Sound®

Action for our region's environment.

January 25, 2025

Senators and Assemblymembers,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

This is the third time I've had a chance to address this joint budget hearing of the Environmental Conservation committees, and I appreciate you inviting us here every year to share our priorities with you. Some of those priorities are unique to our respective regions or areas of focus, but many of the problems we're seeking to resolve are universal, shared by communities in all corners of New York State.

I'm here today as the Vice President of Water Protection and the New York policy lead for Save the Sound, a bi-state environmental action organization working to protect Long Island Sound and its rivers, fight climate change, save endangered lands, and work with nature to restore ecosystems. I would like to address the mounting challenges that threaten all New York communities, but particularly the Long Island Sound region.

In 2023, Moody's Analytics issued a report assessing the economic risk metro areas in the U.S. face from climate change, notably in three categories: warming temperatures, sea level rise, and water stress. New York City was third on the at-risk list; Long Island was fourth. As much as any region in New York State, ours exists on the front lines of the growing climate crisis.

Long Island Sound is an economic engine, contributing billions of dollars every year to the communities that surround it. At Save the Sound, we are, of course, deeply concerned with the dangers that rising temperatures and sea levels and increasingly frequent extreme weather events present to the people, property, homes, and business of the Long Island Sound region. But it is our primary job to remind everyone of the extraordinary environmental toll that the climate crisis has on our natural resources, in particular the Long Island Sound and the rivers that flow into it.

For all the heartbreaking wreckage we see on the news and social media feeds in the wake of the latest storms that hit our area—like the once-in-a-thousand-year storm that dumped 10 inches of rain on communities along the north shore of Suffolk County in July—it is the unseen damage that remains the focus of the work.

Our infrastructure is old and has long-outlived its capacity to handle the scale of the climate-fueled challenges we face in 2025. Excess nitrogen continues to enter the Sound through overwhelmed wastewater infrastructure, whether that's Combined Sewer Overflows in New York City, cracked sewer lines in Westchester County, or leaky septic systems on Long Island that were never intended to treat nitrogen in the first place. Nitrogen pollution is a leading stressor to Long Island Sound, fueling algae blooms which lower dissolved oxygen, killing fish and other animals in the water, contribute to the loss of eelgrass and tidal marshlands, and diminish biodiversity in one of the country's largest estuaries.

Our stormwater infrastructure is increasingly vulnerable, especially in the highly developed areas of the western Sound. Nitrogen-rich stormwater runoff picks up fertilizers and pesticides from our lawns and parks and sweeps them into the Sound. As stormwater runs over the impervious surfaces around us—



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roofs, roads, sidewalks, driveways, and parking lots— it collects fuel, oil, grease, and tire debris, not to mention other chemicals it encounters on its way to the Sound. It also carries pet waste not properly disposed of and other animal waste from catch basins and stormwater pipes. Too often, rain infiltrates cracked sewer pipes and failing septic systems, adding human waste to the potpourri of pollutants the runoff delivers to our beaches. That, of course, can result in elevated levels of fecal indicator bacteria in the water that may require beaches to be closed, sometimes even on sunny summer days.

The good news is we know the solution to these problems: increased investment in our clean water infrastructure.

Save the Sound released our 2024 Long Island Sound Report Card back in October, and we were happy to note that the investments in infrastructure made over the decades and strengthened regulations to reduce nitrogen pollution have helped enable recovery from the bleak days of the 1980s and 1990s when Long Island Sound was dying. The data-driven grades included in our Report Card showed that 98 percent of the open waters of the Sound received a B or better.

The grades for the bays and harbors, though, tell a different story. Sixteen of the 30 New York bays and bay segments monitored through the Unified Water Study, which is managed by Save the Sound, received C grades or worse. Fifteen of those 16—including all four Fs (Inner Eastchester Bay, Westchester Creek, Bronx River, Inner Manhasset Bay)—are located west of Lloyd Harbor.

There is work to be done to protect water quality in our bays and harbors, and it is critical that New York State maximize its clean water investments to ensure the continued recovery of Long Island Sound and to protect clean water across the state, all of which is vulnerable to the degrading effects of climate change.

Every state budget since 2017 has allotted \$500 million to the Clean Water Infrastructure Act. That was a groundbreaking investment eight years ago. But as the Governor noted in her State of the State address and in releasing her executive budget proposal last week, New Yorkers are contending with rising costs for everything. Repairing sewer pipes and upgrading a wastewater treatment plant are no different. In its 2022 Clean Watersheds Needs Survey, the Environmental Protection Agency estimated that clean water infrastructure systems in New York require \$54 billion worth of upgrades. Tack on another \$35 billion for upgrades to drinking water systems across the state.

Municipalities cannot afford the expensive work required to match the challenges of today without the support of state and federal funding, yet they cannot afford not to do the work. Since we cannot foresee what federal support will be made available in the coming years, Save the Sound and our partner organizations in the New Yorkers for Clean Water and Jobs coalition urge our leadership to step up now and raise our investment in the Clean Water Infrastructure Act to \$600 million for FY 2026, \$100 million more than Governor Hochul proposed.

Likewise, it is time to increase the Environmental Protection Fund from \$400 million, where it has been for the last several years, to \$500 million. Every county in New York State, and every borough of New York City, has benefitted from projects funded by the EPF. And we know that every dollar invested in the environment returns \$7 in economic benefits.



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Additionally, we urge the Legislature to put forth a budget that invests:

- \$200 million in capital projects for New York State Parks;
- \$100 million for capital projects managed by the Department of Environmental Conservation;
- Continued transparent implementation of the \$4.2 billion Environmental Bond Act, and that the state meets or exceeds the mandate to spend at least 35 percent of the Bond Act money in disadvantaged communities; and
- \$96,323 to the Interstate Environmental Commission, which monitors water quality in Long Island Sound.

Everything we are advocating for would protect not just Long Island Sound but waterbodies across New York State, as well as the people who fish, swim, and paddle in them, and the habitats depending on clean water for a healthy ecosystem.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

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