2024 Legislative Session Adjourns. CMTA Successful at the Capitol!
By: Linda Kowalski

The 2024 legislative session at the State Capitol roared to a midnight adjournment on Wednesday, passing dozens of bills in the final minutes before adjourning. Traditionally, the Governor comes to the House chamber to thank members of the House and Senate for their good work, but that did not happen early Thursday morning. The Governor stopped by each chamber instead while the session was in progress.

In a major accomplishment for CMTA, in the final hour of the session, the Senate approved CMTA's small harbor improvement projects bill (H.B. 5189).

House Bill 5189, *An Act Concerning a Small Harbor Improvement Projects Account*, passed both chambers: The House passed the bill 148 – 1 – 2 absent and not voting, and unanimously passed the Senate. This forward-looking legislation establishes a specific account where funds for small harbor improvements, including dredging projects and marina infrastructure repair, can be expended. (A similar account exists in statute for the large harbors, but funding is only provided for federal dredging projects). We will be working with the Governor's office to schedule a bill signing ceremony on this during this summer.

In another win, CMTA's government relations team, took the lead this session in urging legislators to keep the CT Port Authority as a quasi-public independent entity. House Bill 5047 was introduced at the behest of the governor to incorporate it under the CT Airport Authority as a subsidiary. The government relations team believed that this could reduce the focus and attention to critical marine matters. At a hearing on the proposal before the Appropriations committee on March 15, CMTA testified:

> *The CT Port Authority has been designated a lead entity to develop a plan with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to enable dredging in our waterways, harbors and marinas. Without dredging, the maritime economy will come to a screeching halt. This is not the time to turn this vital matter over to an entity that has little or no interest or expertise in it. For these reasons, and others, the Connecticut Marine Trades Association would ask that you keep the Connecticut Port Authority where it is right now as a standalone entity; our maritime economy will benefit as a result.*

The committee agreed and took no action on the bill.

CMTA's government relations team also succeeded in retaining the 2.99 tax rate on boat sales. Once again during this session there were legislators and policy groups who sought to flatten the state's tax structure by eliminating special tax provisions like the 2.99 tax rate. We pushed back, and we held off votes on this for another year. Please know that these advocates will be back next year.

We also succeeded in exempting boats from a wide-ranging right-to-repair provision in Senate Bill 3. Ultimately, the bill was not passed by the House.

Finally, House Bill 5523, a proposal to reallocate dollars from the American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA), includes a provision that will have the CT Port Authority provide a quarterly report to the Appropriations committee and Transportation committee that includes a summary of activities on dredging and small harbor improvements. These reports will be key for the public and stakeholders to track progress on this matter.

As always, we want to thank Tasha Cusson, CMTA president, Bob Petzold, CMTA legislative chair, the CMTA board and Jen Kawecki, managing director, for their support and assistance during the legislative session. This great team effort helped make the 2024 legislative session a real success for the CT Marine Trades Association and recreational boating.