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LONG ISLAND / **TOWNS**

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, on Long Island, criticizes proposed National Estuary Program budget cuts

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Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, at the lectern, speaks in Riverhead on Monday about the National Estuary Program. Credit: Tom Lambui

By **Deborah S. Morris**

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Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand was on Long Island Monday to harshly criticize the proposed \$8 million in funding cuts in President Donald Trump's 2026 budget for the [National Estuary Program](#), which supports clean water initiatives, including those on the Island.

Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) announced she helped write a bipartisan letter to her colleagues on the Senate Appropriations Committee in May, seeking \$50 million — \$10 million more than the 2025 operating plan — for the program, including \$1 million for each National Estuary Program site and \$4 million for a competitive grant program. She said the letter offers detailed information on the program and potential negative impact of a funding cut.

"A lot of the spending cuts by this administration up until now have been almost blind spending cuts, just cutting everything in half," she said. "There's no analytical rigor to any of their decisions."

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The National Estuary Program is administered by the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#) to protect and promote 28 nationally significant estuaries in the United States. The Peconic Estuary and Long Island Sound are included in the program, organizers said.

A 736-page document released by the EPA last month, titled "Justification of Appropriation Estimates for the Committee on Appropriations" and provided to Newsday by Gillibrand's office, shows Trump cutting the program's funding to \$32 million for 2026.

The program is a vital resource for its participants to maintain clean water and protect it from environmental threats such as "excess nitrogen pollution, pathogens, and harmful algal blooms," Gillibrand said.

Lee Zeldin, who served parts of Long Island as a congressman from 2015 to 2023, heads the EPA. In an email to Newsday Monday night, an EPA spokesperson said while Zeldin served in Congress, he "secured historic, bipartisan wins that protected the Long Island Sound. As EPA Administrator, Zeldin has reiterated his commitment to preserving this body of water."

Also at the Riverhead news conference with Gillibrand were a host of stakeholders including Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment; Denise Stranko, executive vice president of Programs at Save the Sound; and Kay Tyler, executive director of Concerned Citizens of Montauk. All agreed that less funding puts the critical work done by the local organizations in jeopardy.

Joyce Novak, executive director of the [Peconic Estuary Partnership](#) and chair of the Association of National Estuary Programs, said the program has had 30 years of bipartisan support, leading to cleaner water in areas across the country.

"Getting senators and congresspeople on board from both sides of the aisle is extremely important," Novak said. "On the East End of Long Island, clean water is everything; every community and every individual deserves clean water."

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Bob DeLuca, president of the Group for the East End, a nonprofit aimed at protecting the environment, said it has taken a decade to put in place a broad-based, coordinated community support system to formulate strategies and programs to maintain the area's waters, an effort that has been financially supported by the federal government.

"We're very concerned about any cuts because dollars are hard to come by," DeLuca said. "If our local and state representatives are willing to contribute, we hope that the federal government as part of its own program will make that contribution as well."

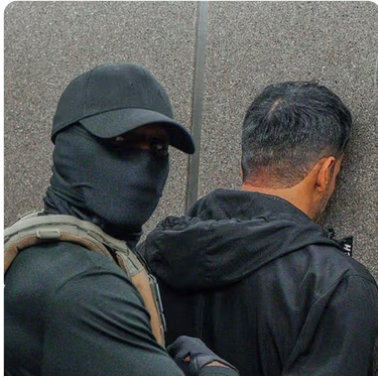
Southold Supervisor Albert Krupski said he supports efforts to secure funding for the National Estuary Program. He said he has worked with the Peconic Estuary Partnership for a long time and cited their work as "critical."

"It's smart to ask for money," Krupski said. "It takes money to do a lot of work."

By Deborah S. Morris

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Deborah Morris is a native Long Islander and covers the town of Huntington.



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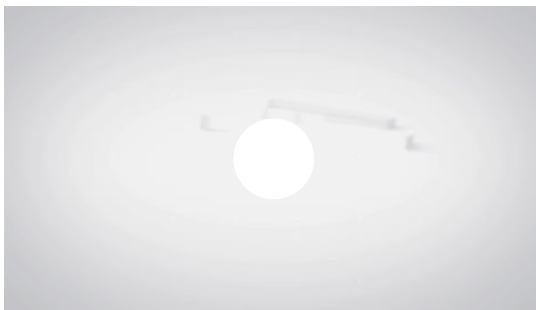
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