

Hello,

My name is David Wassung. I was a Sergeant with the Enfield Connecticut Police Department's Fish and Game Unit for over 19 years before the Unit was shut down more than a year ago. I am here today, as our Unit's representative, to speak in favor of Bill number 5376. My testimony will be relating to Section 1 in reference to Constables for Fish and Game protection.

The Enfield Police Department had a Fish and Game Unit from 1970 thru 2010. The Units duties consisted of enforcing Fish and Game regulations within the town, responding to complaints of injured or rabid animals and removing nuisance animals from people's homes. In addition to those duties our Unit's Marine Division performed search and rescue, Connecticut River patrol, and vessel safety inspections. Our Unit responded to an average of over 300 police dispatched calls per year in the last five years of our existence. Those calls do not include the numerous complaints that we handled by phone from citizens who had concerns ranging from spiders to mountain lions. To summarize this paragraph we were a major asset to the town and also to the state, as we occasionally assisted the State Police in search and rescue and body recovery assignments.

Because the change proposed in statute 26-6a relates to Fish and Game Constables training requirements I would like to discuss this topic. The entire 19 years I was in the Fish and Game Unit we always received firearms and intermediate weapons training from POST certified officers of the Enfield Police Department. These are the same POST certified officers that qualify and train all of the "regular" Police Officers in the department. The Fish and Game officers go through many hours of classroom instruction on such things as use of force, escalation of force, how to properly approach individuals, and many other related issues. The Unit would then qualify with their sidearm and shotgun to the same criteria that the Enfield Police Officers had to adhere to.

In the 40 years that the Enfield Fish and Game Unit was in operation there was not one firearm related incident. This stellar record comes from a Unit that has discharged thousands of rounds of ammunition over the years to euthanize injured, sick, rabid or potentially rabid animals. A perfect record like this doesn't happen just by chance, it comes from proper training with firearms.

There may be some people who oppose this bill that question the extent or quality of our training; those individuals are going by their assumptions as they have no real knowledge about the amount or quality of training that we receive. The people to listen to are our present Chief and all the Chiefs before him for the past 40 years. They were aware of the quality and type of training we received, and all of them were satisfied.

I realize that I have been talking specifically about the town of Enfield and you are voting on a State law. I believe it is safe to state that a Police Chief in any Connecticut town would not form a Fish and Game Constable Unit unless he felt they were, or would be, properly trained by his POST certified Officers.

As my last point I would like to state that with all the cuts that are proposed that may affect the amount of DEP officers in Connecticut, I would hope that Fish and Game Constables would be looked at as an asset to their town and to the State. Please vote in favor of the changes to Bill number 5376 relating to Constables for Fish and Game protection. Thank you.