



## State of Connecticut

### HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

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*Testimony by Representative Charles Ferraro  
Before the Environment Committee  
SB 357 and HB 5720  
March 20, 2015*

Good afternoon Chairmen Kennedy and Albis, Ranking Members Chapin and Shaban, and members of the Environment Committee. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity today to testify in favor of SB 357, AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROMOTION OF THE SHELLFISH INDUSTRY IN CONNECTICUT and HB 5720, AN ACT REQUIRING THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE TO DOUBLE THE CAPACITY FOR SHELLFISH SAMPLE TESTING AND TO ESTABLISH A SITE FOR SHELLFISH SAMPLE TESTING EAST OF THE CONNECTICUT RIVER.

**SB 357** - The purpose of this legislation is to promote the state's shellfish industry through the establishment of a council to oversee the policies and procedures of the state's Bureau of Aquaculture and to afford whistle-blower protections to employees of state shellfish grounds lessees who make certain complaints concerning the administration of such leases. *Shell fishing generates \$30 Million plus in farm-gate sales annually. The industry provides over 300 jobs statewide and it annually harvests exceed 450,000 bushels of Hard Clams and 200,000 of bushels Oysters. More than 70,000 acres of shellfish farms are now under cultivation in Connecticut's coastal waters.*

I urge this committee to seriously consider the establishment of a shellfish council in order to better promote our shellfish industry by: 1. Developing a plan to expand the shellfish industry in Connecticut; 2. Directing the policies and procedures of the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Aquaculture; 3. Assure public access to maps and locations of the state's shellfish leases; 4. Review health and safety standards of the state's shellfish industry; 5. Coordinate with other states to further develop Connecticut's shellfish industry.

**HB 5720** – The purpose of this legislation is to support the expansion of the state's shellfish industry by providing additional facilities for shellfish testing and reducing wait times for the results of such testing.

Currently, the lack of cooperation between the Eastern Connecticut Commissioners for recreational and commercial shell fishing and Connecticut's Department of Agriculture and its Bureau of Aquaculture division has caused stagnation and a lack of growth and development among the Shellfishermen from the Eastern part of our state. Connecticut's shellfishermen are being held back by a harsh regulatory environment. If Connecticut's shellfishermen could get the right kind of support from state agency resources the industry could take off. The Bureau of Aquaculture has stated that the primary purpose of the Aquaculture Bureau is to protect the public from contaminated shellfish, such as Vibrio, a warm water bacteria that was responsible for an illness breakout in Connecticut in 2013. Consequently, it is imperative that commercial and recreational shellfishermen routinely have water and clam meat samples tested. The problem is that Connecticut only has one facility in which such testing can be done. Currently, the only facility in the state for water and meat testing is located in Milford.

Ed Martin, chairman of the Groton Shellfish Commission, has reported that he and other volunteer commissioners are growing increasingly frustrated by the bureau's requirements. During the past year, volunteer commissioners in Eastern Connecticut had to assume responsibility for transporting water and meat samples to the Milford lab after a bureau staff member who lived in the area and had served as a courier for samples was reassigned. The staff member also used to transport samples from the Noank Aquaculture Cooperative, commercial growers who lease town-owned beds in Noank. Currently, the commercial and recreational sides are working together to get the samples to Milford sometimes spending a half day or more on the road. As you might guess this has become a huge burden.

Peter Harris, chairman of the Waterford-East Lyme Shellfish Commission has said that keeping the beds in the Niantic River open for recreational fishermen has become more difficult and that running a recreational shellfishing operation is a challenging task, to comply with all the regulations. "Now we have to get the water samples and the clam meat samples to the lab in Milford". Many feel that the problem is that the bureau is more attentive to the Western part of the state where most of the commercial beds are located. Many of the chairmen of the Eastern commissions yearn for a stronger relationship with the bureau.

I urge this committee to prompt the Department of Agriculture to approve a private laboratory or laboratories located East of the Connecticut River to perform shellfish testing in accordance with health standards set by the Department of Agriculture.

Thank you for holding this hearing on SB 357 and HB 5720. I wish to express my support for the legislation and ask for the committee's favorable action.

Sincerely,

Rep. Charles Ferraro