



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

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Testimony

In Support of HB 5720 An Act Requiring the Department of Agriculture To Double the Capacity For Shellfish Sample Testing East Of The Connecticut River **Environment Committee** **March 20, 2015**

Good afternoon Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis, Senator Chapin, Representative Shaban and members of the Environment Committee. I am Representative John Scott and am here to testify in support of 5720 AN ACT REQUIRING THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE TO DOUBLE THE CAPACITY FOR SHELLFISH SAMPLE TESTING EAST OF THE CONNECTICUT RIVER.

HB 5720 would provide for additional, regionally specific, laboratory space to be opened and made available to the shell fishing commissions that exist in eastern Connecticut by requiring that new lab space be located east of the Connecticut River.

I represent the town of Groton, a town that has a very active shellfish commission and a burgeoning commercial shellfish hatchery. Our oysters have been recognized nationally for their quality, size, and flavor. I find it to be a tremendous source of pride to be at a restaurant anywhere in New England and find our delicious Noank oysters are on the menu. If you haven't had the pleasure of enjoying a Noank oyster please try some next time you are out to eat.

Unfortunately and in spite of our successes, the shellfish industry in Groton has been hamstrung by actions taken by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture and its Aquaculture division. We need the help that would be provided by the passage of this bill.

As things currently exist, the Town of Groton Shellfish Commission supports the commercial hatchery by being the resource for providing water testing in both the commercial and recreational shellfish beds. Our volunteers collect water samples as required and then drive the samples 71 miles along some of the busiest and most congested sections of Interstate 95 to the only approved laboratory located in Milford. This facility being located between Bridgeport and New Haven can take our volunteers in excess of 90 minutes each way to deliver the samples. Our commissioners are volunteers and are using their personal vehicles and personal resources to make the transport. This alone makes it very hard to retain and recruit volunteers who have the time and resources to fulfil the important responsibilities associated with being a shellfish commissioner.

Ultimately the long drive and lack of local resources has reduced the amount of testing that can be completed by our volunteers which has resulted in the closure of recreational beds which has resulted in declining sales in shellfish licenses. Declining revenue has affected our ability to reseed beds and ultimately has seriously and negatively impacted recreational activities.

What is even more discouraging is that this is negatively impacting our commercial growers. Our commercial hatchery, capable of having annual revenue in the tens of millions of dollars that would support more than a dozen employees, is limited to about a half a million dollars in annual revenue and only three employees. Locating a FDA approved shell fishing laboratory east of the Connecticut River would be a tremendous benefit to the Groton Shellfish Commission but would also be of great assistance to the other shellfish commissions located along the eastern Connecticut Coastline.

Further consideration is the potential synergy of locating this lab at UConn's Avery Point Campus and taking advantage of their Marine Sciences Program. This is a four year Bachelors of Science program. As part of the UConn 2000 programs a significant investment was made to create brand new laboratory and classroom spaces and it would not take much to certify one of the labs for FDA approval which would give our students real life exposure to activities happening within the marine environment. In a conversation I had with Avery Point Director Jim Edson this past January he expressed a strong desire in taking on the responsibilities and identified to me that a small investment would be needed to bring a lab up to FDA standards which is why I had also submitted HB5685 AN ACT AUTHORIZING FUNDS FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF SHELLFISH TESTING AT THE AVERY POINT CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT. This bill has not been set for public hearing but should HB5720 progress thought needs to be given towards funding the new lab.

In summary HB5720 would increase eastern Connecticut shellfish commissions ability to collect water samples and get them tested. It would allow commissions to keep their recreational beds open longer and get them open quicker after a high volume rain event. It would allow greater capability to recruit and retain volunteer commissioners and it would reduce their personal costs and free up their time. Finally it would allow commissioners to better support our commercial hatchery that would grow a small business and create a significant number of jobs.

Thank you for your time today.