

I strongly support HB 5720 for the following 4 reasons:

1. The State of Connecticut Bureau of Aquaculture (due to a lack of operating equipment and personnel constraints) no longer collects nor transports FDA required water samples for either commercial or recreational shellfish grounds in Eastern Connecticut. Samples must now be transported by the local shellfish commission members (all volunteers) down to the Milford lab at their own expense. Commercial growers must also (accompanied by a shellfish commission member) collect and convey their own FDA required samples.
2. Eastern Connecticut is the last place in the state with viable recreational shell fishing grounds. The towns of Stonington, Groton and East Lyme/Waterford sell a combined 6000 recreational shell fishing permits annually. The downstream economic impacts far exceed just buying a permit. Last year, both Groton and East Lyme Waterford recreational shell fishing was closed for the entire summer because of a shortage in water sampling. A testing facility east of the CT River would help alleviate that problem.
3. There is vast, untapped potential for shellfish aquaculture in Eastern CT. The Noank Aquaculture Co-Op has 2 new prospective members starting commercial operations this year alone. A regional FDA approved lab would greatly broaden the opportunity to open new shellfish ground to prospective industry entrants.
4. The recently passed Food Safety Modernization Act (2010) greatly expands regulatory oversight in almost every food producing and handling industry in the country. This will require a commensurate increase in testing for a broad spectrum of pathogens and contaminants. There is already a shortage of skilled laboratory personnel to fill these positions. An FDA approved lab and corresponding curriculum at UCONN Avery Point would both add a new testing facility AND produce a steady stream of qualified graduates to fill a rapidly growing high-skill niche in today's job market.

Thank you for your consideration.

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