



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

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Testimony In Support of HB 5720, HB 5722 and SB 357 Environment Committee March 20, 2015

Good morning Senator Kennedy, Representative Albis, Senator Chapin, Representative Shaban, and distinguished members of the Environment Committee.

I am Representative Aundré Bumgardner, and I represent the 41st district consisting of Groton and New London. Over the past few months, I have worked extensively with area residents, members of the Groton Shellfish Commission, and members of the Noank Aquaculture Cooperative on drafting legislation that could provide opportunities for growth in the shell fishing industry. Municipalities in Southeastern Connecticut sell a combined 6,000 recreational shell fishing permits on an annual basis and are home to some of the state's last remaining untapped shell fishing grounds for commercial use. The state should do everything in their power to support an emerging market along the shoreline. I am here to testify on three bills before this committee:

- **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**
- **HB 5722 – An Act Authorizing the Taking of Certain Oysters that are Two and One-Half Inches in Length**
- **SB 357 - An Act Concerning the Promotion of the Shellfishing Industry in Connecticut**

I **strongly support HB 5720**. The Bureau of Aquaculture once collected water samples from commercial shell fishing operations and local shellfish commissions. The Bureau no longer does that. Currently, members of the local shell fishing commissions must transport the samples to the

DA/BA Laboratory in Milford at their own expense. Commercial growers on the other hand, must individually transport their samples and be accompanied by a municipal shellfish commission member. Last year, recreational grounds in Groton were closed because of these issues. This entire process slows down smaller operations throughout Southeastern Connecticut, and holds back the industry from expanding. Establishing a facility in Southeastern Connecticut could increase opportunities to open new shellfish grounds around our region, including sites along the Mystic River and Long Island Sound. For many years, there have been proposals to establish a testing facility at the UCONN Avery Point campus which could tie into their curriculum and expose students to a rapidly growing and local industry. There can be ways to provide relief to the industry without adding significant costs to the state agency.

I **strongly support HB 5722**. The statute pertaining to minimum oyster size(s) is both outdated and predates the introduction of oyster hatcheries into the marketplace. The intended purpose of the law was to address the depletion of the “natural” oyster population and to protect “recreational” beds from overharvesting. Currently, smaller commercial operations that work out of the Noank Aquaculture Cooperative purchase oysters from hatcheries as seed. The seed is their own personal property that they purchased, so changing the statute would allow those folks to have much greater flexibility when selling and growing their product. Like many businesses along the shoreline, the growth rate of oysters can fluctuate depending on the year. Providing greater flexibility is critical to their operations, since an inability to sell oysters without breaking the law could put many of these smaller operations out of business. It would be a mistake to accept this ill-conceived regulation as status quo. Additionally, if the members of the cooperative can sell at a smaller size oyster, it would provide growers a greater opportunity to buy more seed from hatcheries. That in turn, induces an increase in seed production which could have the potential to unleash the shell fishing economy in southeastern Connecticut. It’s a win-win.

Last but not least, I **strongly support SB 357**. The bill would establish an Aquaculture Coordination Council that would oversee the policies and procedures of the Bureau of Aquaculture. It’s without question that there is a communication gap between all parties, and bringing together a diverse array of stakeholders on the recreational and commercial side of shell fishing will be beneficial to the industry’s growth and prosperity.

Thank you for your time, and I urge this committee to support these much needed reforms.