Co-Chairs Kennedy, Demicco, Miner, Ranking Member Harding, and esteemed members of the Environment Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 5361 and SB 344.

While I stand in support of these two bills, I am disappointed that legislation had to be drafted to force the Department of Agriculture to listen to our vibrant shellfish industry—an industry that has come to the table time and again offering to be part of any discussions or solutions to issues regarding the industry.

This Department, through their actions, seem resolute on squeezing these folks. First it was about leases and a farmer’s right to the land, and now they are requiring compliance of a ‘black-box’ program (electronic monitoring device) that has not had a proper regulation review or input from stakeholders before being implemented. The notice from the Bureau of Aquaculture came without any advanced notification one month before the season began. Despite pleas from the industry to meet with officials to discuss details and get answers to the many questions on the program the Department went forward.

This program comes with a cost attached and if it stays as implemented will cost our small businesses anywhere from $5,000 or more in expenses per year—not business friendly at all. In fact, it may be a barrier to others who want to enter the field of shellfish farming.

You will hear from our shellfish farmers how this abrupt and mandatory program has impacted their businesses. They deserve an opportunity to give a voice to any regulation or program that will impact them, especially one that is mandatory and possibly cost-prohibitive.

Many unanswered questions remain, HB5361 and SB344 will provide an opportunity for them to be addressed.

Respectfully,

Pam Staneski
119th District
Milford/Orange