

Steven Sepe

From: Keith A. Lewis <lewisdeepwater@aol.com>
Sent: Monday, April 8, 2024 10:47 AM
To: House State Government and Elections Committee
Cc: sven@northlightfibers.com; clamajama@gmail.com; dan@prentissslaw.com; thamblett@savebay.com
Subject: H-8148 Dept of Coastal Resources

Rep. Evan Shanley
Chairman, House Committee on State Government & Elections

c/o Mr. Steven Sepe, Committee Clerk at
HouseStateGovernmentandElections@rilegislature.gov

from: Keith A. Lewis, 1343 Lewis Farm Road Box 399, Block Island, R.I. 02807

Re: House Bill H-8148

Position: PRO

Dear Representative Shanley,

I seek your support of House Bill H-8148 creating a new Department of Coastal Resources that also includes a full-time staff attorney.

As a courtesy, I should first identify myself: I am a Block Islander. I grew up on the island, went to school here and at age 77, it's still my home. I was a merchant seaman for much of my life, sailing to various parts of the world, so I am very familiar with the marine environment. I have also been a volunteer for many years (along with many others) in land and nature conservation.

Rhode Island's environment is one of the factors that make this state such a lovely and inviting place. Its coastal waters are a major part of that attraction. Most of those waters are Public Trust Waters--an important environmental asset. They're also an important economic asset, for the fishing industry and for luring tourist dollars to the state.

Authority for those waters is currently vested in the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC), a body composed of political appointees. Some of those appointees have demonstrated little interest in the environment. Some have no real knowledge of the technical issues with which they are involved.

Though the professional staff at CRMC is highly competent, the ultimate decisions are in the hands of the political appointees. One can't help but wonder about the ethics of their decisions. Who had input from the sidelines?

An especially egregious situation has been the case of Champlin's Marina. Some business owners sought permission to extend or build marinas in public trust waters to an unreasonable degree. Had they prevailed, it would have set a horrible precedent for other public trust waters. The cost and effort to protect those waters fell to volunteers, the community, and environmental organizations. Protection of those waters took years and cost the public many thousands of dollars. Under the current

management scheme business reaps the financial benefits; donors and local institutions foot the bill of protecting those Public Trust Waters.

Rhode Island needs additional safeguards to protect its coastal resources. I urge your support of this legislation.

Thank you so much.

Yours truly,

Keith A. Lewis