

Steven Sepe

From: Robin Squibb <srsquibb@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 8, 2024 8:07 AM
To: House State Government and Elections Committee
Subject: Testimony IN FAVOR of House Bill 8148

To: Stephen Sepe, Committee Clerk

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF H8148 CRMC REFORM BILL

My name is Robin Squibb. I live in Saunderstown, Rhode Island.

I became involved with CRMC's council first hand when some neighbors and I opposed CRMC's granting of a variance to another neighbor to build a 110 foot dock with two boat lifts. The hearing was a farce. The council paid absolutely no attention to their own rules and regulations. They were disrespectful, unprofessional and arrogant. Needless to say, we lost. I would guess that the decision had been made long before the hearing began. At great expense, we appealed the decision to Superior Court and, much to our surprise, the decision was overturned. But now, at even greater expense, the case has been appealed to the Supreme Court. We await their decision. It's been over five years.

After reading about the Champlin's Boatyard case, I realized the whole state was being affected by this council. I reached out to Save the Bay, Attorney General Peter Neronha, and my own Senator, Alana D'Mario, and anyone I could find to help me understand what was going on. I quickly learned that for years this politically appointed, rogue council has had the absolute power to rule the CRMC, yet not one of them has ever been required to have a single scrape of knowledge in any areas under the CRMC's jurisdiction. And most of them don't. Yet, the council has used its given authority, time and time again, to overturn decisions made by the extremely competent staff members whose knowledge, training and expertise in all sectors of coastal policy is completely wasted. The council is held responsible to no one.

This long over due bill would change all that. It creates a new agency called the Rhode Island Department of Coastal Resources. The politically appointed, ten member council of the CRMC would be removed. Like other state agencies, the director and staff with their training and expertise, would have the authority to make all decisions and would be held accountable for them. A newly created advisory board, with required expertise, would be put in place simply to advise. Finally, the reform needed to protect and manage Rhode Island's unique coastal environment would be in place.

One can only speculate why so little has been done to ensure that the CRMC carries out its stated primary responsibility "for the protection, development and where possible restoration of the

coastal areas of the state." ~~Yet it appears that for years, the main focus of the CRMC has been pro-development.~~ But times have changed since this agency was formed in 1971. It's no longer just about docks and marinas. It's about rising waters due to global warming, the development of off shore wind, and of maintaining a delicate balance in the use of the bay for aquaculture, recreation, tourism and environmental justice. Narragansett Bay is Rhode Island's most important asset, and it must be maintained wisely for the sake of all Rhode Islanders.