

TESTIMONY AT HEARING FOR H8148 CRMC REFORM BILL, APRIL 9, 2024

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My name is Stuart Ross, and I am Chair of Protect Conanicut Coastline, a small non-profit environmental advocacy organization based in Jamestown. I live at 1026 East Shore Road in Jamestown. I am writing in strong support for H 8148.

My organization's first contact with CRMC came four years ago, when the Jamestown Boatyard/Safe Harbor applied to CRMC for a permit to expand its dock space and dredge some 20,000 square feet of the seabed in a small, highly used recreational inlet – Dumplings Cove -- that has long been recognized for its very scenic viewshed. We collected over 660 signatures of Jamestown residents against the permit and filed that petition with CRMC that summer. At a public hearing over Zoom in the fall, 26 Jamestowners testified against approving the permit. But the will of the local residents and their very real concerns about public safety and environmental damage were totally ignored by the Council, which voted 4-2 in favor of JBY/SH.

Three months later, RI Attorney Peter Neronha delivered a scathing letter to CRMC citing the numerous flaws in the procedures and failure of CRMC to observe their own rules in the Red Book. An appeal is still in Superior Court, three years later.

So what we witnessed over the next two years was a dangerous pattern in CRMC behavior, including a midnight attempt to overturn a longstanding rule that had stopped the expansion of another marina on Block Island, and a violation of state law regarding the siting of underground cables from the oceanic wind farm under construction. Clearly CRMC was an organization out of control, and it needed to be overhauled at the very top. Removing the 10 Councilors who held absolute power over decisions that directly affect the marine environment of Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island's most valuable asset, was essential. Nothing less than changing the law establishing CRMC, from over 40 years ago, would suffice.

So we have joined the growing campaign to reform CRMC by transforming it into a transparent, environmentally-focused organization in the model of the RI Department of Environmental Management. Given all of CRMC's missteps over the years, failures to abide by their own Red Book and misguided overruling of staff reports, H8148 is a Bill that is long overdue. It will give to the new Rhode Island Department of Coastal Resources a much higher level of expertise, efficiency and accountability in protecting and managing this state's unique coastal resources. We strongly support the passage and enactment of H8148 in this year's General Assembly.

Thank you.

Stuart C. Ross