

Ocean State Aquaculture Association

*Rhode Island's Aquaculture Trade Association
P.O. Box 2031, Kingston, RI 02881*

House Committee on Government and Elections

April 8, 2025, 2025

Dear Chairman Shanly,

I am writing on behalf of the Ocean State Aquaculture Association members to support **Representative Cortvriend's bill H5706**. This bill proposes significant reforms to the CRMC's management and structure, which will help ensure transparency, independence, and restore confidence in government.

Farmed oysters are the highest-value product landed from state waters, valued at over \$7 million. They are produced by 41 firms that employ several hundred Rhode Islanders working 364 acres of leased grounds, a tiny fraction of the over 80,000 acres of state waters.

The CRMC has been lauded for the professionalism and qualifications of its staff. Still, the Council's decisions often appear to go against the recommendations of professional staff, bowing to political pressure. These decisions are then often overturned by the courts.

H5706 would abolish the politically appointed Council, provide for a dedicated, full-time staff attorney to ensure independent legal counsel, and establish a Department of Coastal Resources. Importantly, the bill would establish an independent Community Advisory Committee composed of residents with training and expertise in conserving and managing our precious marine resources.

These steps will ensure that the CRMC acts as intended as an independent arbiter of the many challenging issues related to the use of our coastal waters, protecting the natural resources while managing the multiple uses of our submerged lands, free from the pressures of state and local politics.

We expect these changes will help restore public confidence in the body and reduce the number of decisions reversed in the courts.

Sincerely,



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