

Ocean State Aquaculture Association

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

House Committee on State Government and Elections

March 15, 2023

Dear Chairman Evan Shanley,

I am writing on behalf of the members of the Ocean State Aquaculture Association to express **support for Representative Tanzi's bill H 6034** – which proposes significant reforms to the management and structure of the CRMC.

Farmed oysters are the highest value product landed from state waters with a value over \$6.5 million, produced by 41 firms that employ several hundred Rhode Islanders working 364 acres of leased grounds. This is a tiny fraction of the over 80,000 acres of state waters.

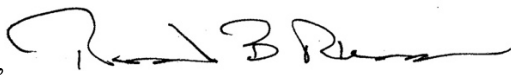
The CRMC has been lauded for the professionalism and qualifications of its staff, but the decisions of the Council often appear to go against the recommendations of professional staff, appearing to bow to political pressure. These decisions are then often overturned by the courts.

H 6034 would establish a Department of Coastal Resources. It would provide for a dedicated, full-time staff attorney to ensure independent legal counsel, and allow for the hiring of a hearing officer. H 6034 would replace the politically-appointed Council members with a Citizen Advisory Committee to guide the Department and the Director on policy initiatives and program improvement.

We also support H 5966 and H 5779 whose aims are embedded in H 6034.

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 numbers of decisions reversed in the courts.

Sincerely, 

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Executive Director, East Coast Shellfish Growers Association
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