



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony in support of

LD 222 – An Act To Reduce Commercial Shellfish License Fees for Persons under 18 Years of Age Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources

Senator Baker, Representative Kumiega, Distinguished Colleagues of the Marine Resources Committee:

My name is Will Tuell. I represent the communities of Cutler, East Machias, Eastport, Lubec, Machias, Machiasport, Roque Bluffs, Whiting and Trescott in the 127th Legislature, and consider it an honor to serve on a committee such as Marine Resources that is so representative of my district.

Now that I have buttered you all up, let's get to the reason why I am standing here instead of sitting back there with the rest of you.

I am here today to present LD 222, a bill which would reduce commercial shellfish license fees for folks under 18.

As I noted before, most, if not all, of my towns are fishing communities. They fish lobster, scallops, dig clams, and/or harvest other species. They are quintessential Down East fishing villages. Folks there drive beat up old pickup trucks, wear jeans with holes in the knees, and have fishing gear in their yards.

Despite their rough exterior many of the men and women of my district – up and down the coast really – are hard-working, traditional, self-reliant folks who know how to earn an honest dollar, take a lot of pride in passing their livelihood on to their sons and grandsons, daughters and granddaughters, and don't ask for much. You might even say Augusta is a dirty word in certain circles down home.

Nowhere is this more true than on the clam flats of Washington County.

Yet today, I present a bill that might just go down better than the best pot of steaming hot clam chowder you or they ever tasted.

LD 222 lowers the fee the state charges junior shellfish harvesters from \$133 to \$67. It cuts it in half for folks under 18, and sets it at the same rate that the state charges for folks over 70.

Why is this important? There are several reasons, really.

One, it makes shellfish licenses more affordable for kids in low income homes. In mine and Representative Alley's areas, we have lots of kids living in poverty. This gives them a chance to bring a little extra money into the household, buy school clothes, save for college. It gives them a chance to pull themselves out of poverty.

District 139 Cutler, East Machias, Eastport, Lubec, Machias, Machiasport, Roque Bluffs and Whiting, plus the unorganized territory of Trescott Township

Sure, a \$67 savings is small potatoes if you've had it good, but if you haven't, or you came from humble beginnings to start with, you value every dollar.

Two, the kids buying these licenses are our fishermen of tomorrow. They're the ones that are going to be keeping our entire industry – not just shellfish – going for the next 50-60 years. And truly, they're going to breathe new life into it at a time when many of our communities are at a crossroads.

Three, we already do this for elderly clammers. Why not invest in our youth, and let them invest in themselves? If kids want to work, if kids will work, we ought to encourage that instead of throwing up roadblocks. And many of the kids back home WANT to work, and WILL work.

Four, these are not year-round clammers. If a kid wants to dig clams, they basically have the summer to do it in. Why should they pay full price for two or three months when everyone else can dig year round?

So you're probably wanting to know what the hitch is.

The bill comes with a fiscal note of \$5100 – approximately \$4600 to the general fund and \$500 to the shellfish fund annually, assuming the number of license holders stays flat.

While I don't see this as a big deal, and think we might actually see an increase in licenses, I also don't want this bill to languish on the Appropriations table, and have, with the help of our clam shuckers behind the scenes – Craig Nale & James Robbins – come up with a solution.

The nutshell version is that if we raise the standard license price that the state charges from \$133 to \$135.72, we can make up the difference in both the general fund and shellfish fund. This would apply only to state fees, and it would only apply to folks 18-69.

Another option would be to raise the price for adult licenses (again, 18-69) to \$135.40. This would cover the general fund gap, but leave the shellfish fund gap at \$550.

I prefer the bill in its original form. But something Chairman Kumiega said on the first day is rattling about in my mind. And that is, we ought to try to get unanimous reports whenever possible. So I offer these alternatives in that vein. If folks are uncomfortable with leaving a \$5100 hole, and don't want to speculate about the future number of licenses, I would encourage you to accept what Craig and James have prepared.

I see this as an opportunity to find common ground, to not adversely impact DMR, and to be bipartisan as Senator Baker and Rep. Kumiega felt was important from day one.

This is a bipartisan bill – five Republicans, five Democrats signed on. It's a win win for our communities. And we ought to do what we can to get this through with as few hiccups along the way as possible.

Thank you,

Rep. Will Tuell