

131st Legislature
Senate of
Maine
Senate District 24

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Testimony of Senator Eloise Vitelli presenting
**LD 1915, Resolve, to Establish a Grant Program to Issue Shellfish Licenses to
Qualified Disabled Veterans**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources
May 18, 2023

Senator Reny, Representative Hepler, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources, my name is Eloise Vitelli, and I represent Senate District 24, which includes all of Sagadahoc County and the town of Dresden in Lincoln County. I am before you all today to introduce LD 1915, “Resolve, to Establish a Grant Program to Issue Shellfish Licenses to Qualified Disabled Veterans.”

Last year, one of my Bowdoin constituents contacted me and asked for help with making shellfish licenses available to disabled Maine veterans. In my constituent’s case, he suffers from a traumatic brain injury that prevents him from maintaining regular working hours expected in the traditional workplace.

In the years since returning from military service, my constituent has settled on clam harvesting as a means of earning an income. This type of work gives him the flexibility he needs, given his medical condition, while also allowing him to provide for his family. In this work, however, my constituent has encountered a barrier: 90% of commercial shellfish harvesting licenses are set aside for residents of coastal towns. The remaining 10% are given to non-town residents. Bowdoin, as you know, is not a coastal town, so it might take decades – and luck at the lottery – before my constituent could get one of the non-resident licenses.

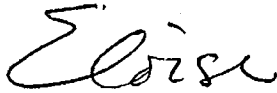
That’s why I’m bringing this bill proposal to this committee. I have worked with the Department on draft language that would establish a grant program. It would allow DMR to award funds for shellfish restoration work, including seeding, to municipalities that are willing to modify their shellfish ordinances to issue licenses to disabled veterans.

I trust that you and the Department can combine your experiences and expertise to further craft and refine this program. In particular, what remains to be determined is:

- The process by which the towns notify DMR that they would like to participate in the program;

- How towns can choose which interested (and eligible) disabled veterans would receive the licenses; and
- How many licenses towns could make available.

I thank you for your time and your willingness to explore the potential of this new program. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



Eloise Vitelli
Senate Majority Leader, Senate District 24
Sagadahoc County and Dresden