

**TESTIMONY OF
Deirdre Gilbert
Department of Marine Resources**

**The Department of Marine Resources (DMR) is testifying
Neither For Nor Against
LD 1915 Resolve, to Establish a Grant Program to Issue Shellfish Licenses to
Qualified Disabled Veterans
Before the Committee on Marine Resources
Sponsored by Senator Vitelli
Date of Hearing: May 18, 2023**

Senator Reny, Representative Hepler, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources, my name is Deirdre Gilbert, Director of State Marine Policy for the Department of Marine Resources, and I am testifying on behalf of the Department neither for nor against LD 1915.

LD 1915 directs the Department to create a grant program that would make awards for shellfish restoration projects to municipalities that agree to make municipal shellfish licenses available to disabled veterans. Under existing law (Title 12 Section 6671) municipalities may adopt shellfish conservation ordinances, and those ordinances may include the establishment of qualifications for a license, including municipal residency, subject to certain provisions.

In towns with robust shellfish resources, licenses are often in high demand, especially the 10% of licenses that must be made available to individuals who are not town residents. When available, those licenses are currently allocated by the town through a lottery process and/or prequalification through an investment of conservation time, and there is currently no preference given to disabled veterans who may wish to pursue this activity as their livelihood.

If the Legislature wishes to incentivize municipalities to increase their available shellfish licenses by providing funds to those municipalities who are willing to make new licenses available to disabled veterans, the Department can administer such a grant program. However, it would be very beneficial to obtain some additional guidance from the committee, to ensure that we design this program in such a way that will ensure that your objectives in providing this funding are met. Specifically:

- With the proposed funding of \$10,000, how many towns does the committee expect would participate in this program? For reference, the Department recently released a “mini-grant” program for municipalities using \$20,000 from the Department’s Opportunity Fund. We proposed issuing 5 grants of \$4,000 but learned that the general reaction to that amount was that it was not sufficient to generate interest from many municipalities. For this reason, we would anticipate that proposed funding for this program would be sufficient to incentivize at most 2 municipalities.
- How many additional licenses for disabled veterans would the committee expect a municipality be willing to authorize? Is one additional license sufficient to meet the objectives of creating this program?

- What is the expectation for how many years the municipality will continue to offer the additional license? Understanding this will be important for the Department to know what to require in making the award. Would the original recipient be grandfathered, or have some other assurance of obtaining the license in a subsequent year?
- Is the expectation that the new license(s) created be made available at the current cost charged by the municipality, or at no-cost, as is sometimes the case with licenses made available for disabled veterans?
- Is the expectation that the license holder meet all other municipal licensing requirements, including any conservation time obligations that may be included?

It is difficult to anticipate the level of interest that this opportunity would elicit from municipalities, but if there are more applications than available grants, it is not immediately clear to the Department how we would select among interested towns, except perhaps through a subjective evaluation of where the highest quality harvesting opportunity would be provided.

In closing, as we have indicated to Senator Vitelli, the Department stands ready to administer this opportunity if requested. We ask only for sufficient guidance to ensure that we understand your objectives in making this opportunity available so that we can design this program to ensure those objectives are met.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.