

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

**The Department of Marine Resources (DMR) is testifying
In Opposition to
LD 2026 An Act to Authorize Medical Waivers for Menhaden Fishing Licenses
Before the Committee on Marine Resources
Sponsored by Senator Moore
Date of Hearing: January 25, 2024**

Senator Reny, Representative Hepler and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources, my name is Deirdre Gilbert, Director of State Marine Policy, Department of Marine Resources, and I am testifying on behalf of the Department in opposition to LD 2026.

Similar to a bill you heard last session, LD 2026 seeks to change the eligibility criteria that were previously established to determine who could obtain a commercial menhaden license in 2023 and subsequent years. Specifically, this bill proposes to authorize the commissioner to issue licenses to individuals who did not meet the eligibility criteria because a medical issue prevented them from fishing during the qualifying years.

Like the Committee, the Department is sympathetic to individuals who did not qualify for a commercial menhaden license. However, in drawing these lines, some individuals inevitably did not qualify, and there are many potential reasons for this. The point of the qualifying criteria was to limit eligibility to those individuals who had recent history in the fishery. Following the change that was made last session, a person could qualify by having held a license in any two of following years: 2019, 2020, 2021 or 2022, and by having landings of at least 25,000 lbs in any one of those years. It was not considered necessary to create a medial appeal process for eligibility, as participants only needed landings in one of the four years. If someone was not active at the necessary level in any of the four years, they were considered not recently active in the fishery.

Based on the current eligibility criteria, 371 people were eligible for a 2023 license, and all of them obtained that license. As has been previously explained, this is already approximately 100 licenses more than the Department was targeting to responsibly manage this fishery within the available quota. At this point, the Department would strongly urge the Committee to avoid further modifications to the eligibility criteria. We have no way of knowing how many additional individuals would qualify through a medical appeal process, and such additions would only delay future entry for other participants.

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