



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1440
TTY: (207) 287-4469

William R. Tuell

431 Hadley Lake Road
East Machias, ME 04630
Phone: (207) 271-8521

William.Tuell@legislature.maine.gov

Senator Tepler, Representative Hepler, Distinguished Members of the Marine Resources Committee:

I am Representative Will Tuell, and I am here today to present LD 2031, "An Act to Offer Military Veterans a 50 Percent Discount on the License Fee for a Commercial Shellfish License." on behalf of a constituent who served in the military during the Vietnam War era and came home to little praise or appreciation.

During my first first term, I submitted a bill that allows young people to purchase a state clam license for half price. The price of a state license at the time was \$133. It may still be, so for Downeast kids who use that money to buy school clothes and supplies – yes, they still do – the \$66 savings was a blessing, and it showed that our state was committed to encouraging young people to get into the workforce.

That bill also opened the door to young people getting into commercial fishing. Clamming, while not the half billion dollar behemoth, a major part of our commercial fishing economy. Several of my towns rank among the highest grossing clamming towns in the state, or have, in recent years.

That bill won unanimous support of the committee at the time and became law. Since, a generation of young clambers have benefited by the savings, some as much as \$500-600 over the span of their young lives.

Fast forward to today. This bill seeks to help veterans who have come home – some from war, some from deployment halfway across the country or the world – by offering them the same deal. A small thank you for their service, and, just as importantly, something that can help them re-enter the civilian world. For some, it may be a supplemental income; for all, it is a vote of confidence that you are a contributing member of society.

In these days of affordability being the buzzword, this bill makes it easier for someone who has paid an incredible debt to our society to make ends meet. While \$66 doesn't seem like a lot to some, this state has record surpluses and reserve funds, and ought to be able to help people who put their lives in harm's way earn their own way.

This is not a handout for veterans. Clamming is back breaking work, and the numbers of clambers are small. When I talked with Deirdre prior to submitting this bill, she told me there were roughly 1,000 clam diggers statewide.

One of her concerns was that the Department had no way of tracking how many of those 1,000 people are veterans. When I told Representative Strout about this on one of our white knuckle rides back to Washington County, she suggested that we could simply change the bill to require proof of honorable discharge. Representative Thorne has experience in the recruiting field and could likely also offer up some ideas for how the department could, within existing resources, identify clam diggers who are veterans.

I know that the Department is going to testify against this bill. Their biggest argument, beyond the tracking and quantifying a fiscal note, is what kind of a precedent this will set for other fisheries. I would argue that fishermen still have to navigate the entry guidelines for all fisheries and that clamming is one of the smallest. One of the bigger barriers to getting in, that this bill doesn't address, is the fact that clambers still have to purchase a town license or secure a license through an out of town lottery.

I want to make it clear that I am not suggesting we upset that dynamic or that we halve municipal shellfish conservation budgets. Towns are struggling to maintain what they have on shoestring budgets, this bill only applies to the state license. With that though, the entry into each fishery is not apples to apples but apples to oranges, or, in this case, clams to lobsters.

Lastly, to I would say to anyone who believes this is a handout and that veterans are not expecting a freebie, that it takes a special person to be able to get up at 3 a.m. venture out onto the flats in a howling wind, beat your hoe into the clay, and sack buckets upon buckets of clams back to terra firma all before the tide changes. It's work – work I can't do and most here, with the exception of Rep. Simmons and maybe a couple others, haven't done.

I have also included with my testimony a copy of my constituent, Tom Sprague's, thoughts on this legislation. Please read them, deliberate, and consider supporting a bill that only the most rugged, determined veterans will utilize.

Thank you!

I am in full support of Bill number ID2031

Greetings to you all!! I consider it to be an honor to present this letter before you all today! I am here today (via email) advocating for all Maine Veterans who were honorably discharged from the military! I am hoping that you all will agree with me that our Veterans deserve a State clam license at half price!!

A little about myself--I began digging clams at the age of 12 in the Town of Machiasport. I fell in love with clamming and was a self employed clam digger for many years. In 1965 I received my draft notice which began--"Your friends and neighbors have selected you to represent them"--and I ran out into the yard thinking--"where are they? I want to talk to them!" I spent two years (one year in Viet Nam) in the Army representing my home town of Machiasport, and the State of Maine.

I have dug clams off and on over the past years. About ten years ago, I went to the Town of Machiasport to see if they would consider giving a free clam license to the Veterans who represented the Town of Machiasport. One man said-"Tom, we will lose a lot of revenue if we did that!" To which I replied-"You would have no revenue to lose if it weren't for Veterans!" A few years ago, I approached a Selectman of Machiasport and asked him about giving Veterans a FREE clam license--to which he replied--"You write it up, and I will sign it." I did write it up and sent it to the Selectmen of Machiasport. As of today, I still have not had a reply!!

I had mentioned about a reduced license to Representative Will Tuell, and he thought it was a good idea--and because of Will, I present this letter!! I know that we do honor our Veterans with a parade and a Veterans supper every year--but let's go farther than that!! Let's honor our discharged Vets with a reduced commercial clam license.

My father was a veteran and also a clam digger. He fought the Japanese in world war 2, and came home with Malaria, and they didn't expect him to live, but he did, and raised 8 children by digging clams and fishing 90 lobster traps. If you folks vote to give Vets a reduced clam license, it will be in honor of many like my dear

father!! I am almost 80 years old, and my clam digging days are numbered, but let's pave the way for all of our Veterans who dig clams and love doing it!!!

Thank you for hearing me today, and remember that it's for our Veterans who gave their very lives to keep us FREE!!! May the Lord bless you all as you prepare to vote on this Bill.

Respectfully yours,

Thomas Sprague
177 Means Cottage Road
East Machias, ME 04630