



Rhode Island General Assembly

Office of the House Minority Leader

NEWS

Contact: Ian O'Connor
Tel: (401) 222-2259
Email: IOConnor@rilegislature.gov

Date: April 3, 2018

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Representative Justin K. Price Fights for Rhode Island's Fishing Industry

STATE HOUSE -- Representative Justin K. Price (R-District 39 Exeter, Hopkinton, Richmond) has introduced legislation to help restore stability to the Rhode Island commercial fishing community. Local fishermen are challenged with the daunting task of complying with a number of minor regulations that, if violated, can lead to debilitating penalties. The bill, also sponsored by Rep. Robert A. Nardolillo, will help ensure a fair environment for these small businesses.

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management ("RIDEM") law enforcement agents currently have the power to seize all fishing equipment from a fisherman in violation of state and federal law. According to local fishermen, DEM agents have used this ability excessively, causing major financial distress to their businesses. The seizure of gear can result in outsized costs for even the simplest or smallest violation. Seized licenses and equipment mean that a business cannot operate until they have been through the RIDEM adjudication process, which results in the loss of catch, unjustified fines, and the loss of valuable fishing time.

"This has been an issue for way too long. When a vessel and its catch are seized over something minor or questionable, it takes months to settle these violations leaving the captain, crews and fish-houses without income. The lack of structure and upgrading that is needed for the RIDEM's General Provisional laws would simply level the playing field to ensure that there are protections in place for small businesses to continue to function until they have been through an adjudication process," said Richard Fuka, President of the Rhode Island Fishermen's Alliance.

Rep. Price's bill would address these concerns by allowing fishermen who feel their equipment has been seized unfairly to file a claim in superior court challenging the decision. It would also allow the fishermen to pay a bond to recover their property before the trial. The fishermen may also seek compensation for anything not returned, such as the value of their catch if the court rules that the violation was not significant or substantial.

"Rhode Island has a rich fishing heritage, but today that industry is threatened by regulations and government overreach," stated Rep. Price.



Rhode Island General Assembly

Office of the House Minority Leader

NEWS

“These are small business owners who contribute millions to our economy, and yet they can have their livelihood torn away without any recourse. This legislation will allow them to keep working while the courts make their determination,” said Rep. Nardolillo who cosponsors the bill.

The fishing industry accounts for nearly 5000 jobs in Rhode Island, making it an important part of the state’s economy. The number of commercial fishing boats in the state fleet has decreased in the past decade, making every crew and vessel vital to sustain one of the state’s oldest and most essential industries.

###