

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-838

AN ACT CONCERNING MINOR REVISIONS TO CERTAIN FISHING PROGRAMS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION.

Title: PROTECTION.

Vote Date: 2/26/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: February 10, 2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Craig C. Fishbein, 90th Dist.

Rep. Travis Simms, 140th Dist.

Sen. Catherine A. Osten, 19th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Section 1. Subsection (h) of section 26-30 of the general statutes currently limits a group fishing license of a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) to fifty persons. Senate Bill 838 increases the number of persons to 100. The request for this increase has been the successful work of various non-profit groups as Take-A-Vet fishing. These programs have had to turn away qualified persons under the current statute, as events have exceeded the capacity of fifty persons under the group fishing license.

The popularity of fishing has since the pandemic has increased significantly, providing an opportunity to sportfish trout without a closed end season continues the popularity of fishing.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Commissioner Katie S. Dykes, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) acknowledges the increase in group fishing license benefits the support groups of disabled veterans. DEEP encourages recreational fishing opportunities can provide benefits to participants and supports Section 1.

DEEP does not support Section 2. Addressing fishing stocks, season and catch limits are best pursued through regulatory framework of DEEP's conservation professional staff. DEEP encourages active participation in fishing and is interested in expanding access to trout fishing.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Robert LaFrance, Audubon Society Connecticut

Audubon Society supports SB838. Persons enjoy the outdoors, walking trails and watching birds by a body of water. Expansion of group fishing licenses to groups, as the disabled veterans opens the experience to nature for all. The expansion of the trout season provides a similar experience. Audubon believes everyone should share the outdoor experience.

Bill Lucey, Save the Sound

DEEP permitted an early fishing season for 2020 in response to the COVID pandemic. Persons were isolated, out of work, or shut in at home. Fishing gave an opportunity to individual and families to experience the outdoors, while socially distancing.

License sales increased last year as fishing licenses has been in decline for many years. New licensed anglers saw the beauty of the outdoors while fishing. Anglers that have an interest in the environment and take and interest in the local ecology and if provoked, can be protectors of the environment when the environment is in turmoil.

Timothy Nicholson, Take A Vet Fishing

Supports SB838. Take A Vet Fishing with other volunteer organizations puts on an event to support taking our Disabled Veterans out fishing for the day. Take A Vet Fishing sponsors thirteen events through the year to help these veterans.

The events are very popular and under current rules, it is only limited to fifty participants. The demand at these events means Disabled Veterans are turned away. Events that provide comradery, the outdoors and enjoyment for these Disabled Veterans.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Bruce Tolhurst

Opposes SB838 Section 2, with respect to specific wording. In general, supports a year-round trout season, but opposes a trout season codified by statute. The Connecticut Legislature should pass a resolution, not statute, to have DEEP review and make appropriate changes to fishing regulations at the agency level.

Stephen Gephard

Opposes Section 2 of SB838. Opening fishing day is a tradition that generations of families have looked forward to, even for the casual angler. The loss of opening fishing day would

disenfranchise these anglers, lead to lower numbers of anglers over the period of the fishing season and lead to lower license revenues.

DEEP already maintains open many Trout Management Areas (TMA) that are open all year long where the fishing is excellent. A year-round open treat season across the state puts a strain on limited stocks through out the state. The reduction in the fishing experience, again, disenfranchises the casual angler.

DEEP is best equipped to maintain the environmental requirements of fishing in Connecticut through regulatory policies and not through statute.

William Hyatt

Opposes Section 2 of SB 838. Fishing season length, size limits and catch limits are the fishery management tools DEEP's professional staff to manage the fishing ecology environment.

Not having fishing Opening Day reduces the supportive budgetary impact received from licensure. Massachusetts eliminated opening day and saw approximately 20% decline in licenses sold. Anglers look forward with excitement to fishing Opening Day, if there is no Opening Day the casual angler may just skip fishing for that year. License fees the state will not receive for that year.

Reported by: [Type Report By]

Date: [Type Date]