

# Congress of the United States

## Washington, DC 20510

July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-233, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-204, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer:

As you prepare for the next COVID-19 recovery package, we request that you provide at least \$500 million in fisheries assistance, specifically targeted towards producers who were ineligible for assistance from the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) as well as those who were ineligible or did not receive sufficient assistance from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)'s Section 12005 funds.

CFAP has been a lifeline for farmers and agricultural enterprises throughout our country, and we strongly support continued funds for this purpose. Unfortunately, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has elected to make certain aquaculture producers ineligible for assistance through the CFAP program. As a result, shellfish producers – especially in our State of Connecticut – have received far less in assistance than other sectors, despite suffering much greater losses. In Connecticut, the average reduction in revenue in 2020 after COVID-19 restrictions were put into place was a 93 percent loss compared to 2019. Additionally, more than 70 percent of Connecticut's aquaculture workforce has been laid off during this time.

Privately owned aquaculture businesses growing products in state or federal marine waters, including all molluscan shellfish and marine algae, are not covered through CFAP and were only permitted to receive assistance through the U.S. Department of Commerce's \$300 million fisheries assistance program. We commend NOAA for making these funds readily available to states, including Connecticut, but believe that more is urgently needed for this industry.

In our State of Connecticut, fisheries and aquaculture producers will receive \$1.8 million in total funds from NOAA, divided between commercial fishing, recreational fishing, wholesale and shellfish aquaculture. After these resources have been distributed, the entire shellfish industry in Connecticut will receive approximately \$450,000 in assistance, a woefully inadequate sum which will be spread thinly throughout our State's \$30 million industry.

Providing \$500 million in additional NOAA fisheries assistance targeted to the most affected industries – especially shellfish – will be a lifeline to our nation's shellfish farmers during this economically challenging time.

Additionally, we realize that existing programs are already available through USDA that could provide significant assistance to this sector. Specifically, USDA's Section 32 program to purchase surplus commodities has provided significant assistance to agricultural enterprises to prevent steep price declines. We believe that shellfish aquaculture are an appropriate candidate to this purchase program. USDA has failed to avail Section 32 purchases to the shellfish industry, and we request additional funds for Section 32 purchases, with an emphasis on sectors that did not receive a purchase thus far in 2020, including shellfish aquaculture.

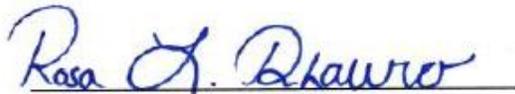
We urge you to support this targeted assistance in any future COVID-19 package.

Sincerely,

  
JOE COURTNEY  
Member of Congress

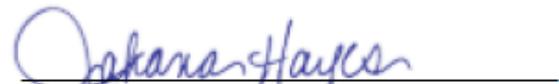
  
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senate

  
CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY  
United States Senate

  
ROSA L. DELAURO  
Member of Congress

  
JOHN B. LARSON  
Member of Congress

  
JIM HIMES  
Member of Congress

  
JAHANA HAYES  
Member of Congress