

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

504 BROADWAY  
LONG BRANCH, NJ 07740  
(732) 571-1140

67/69 CHURCH STREET  
KILMER SQUARE  
NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ 08901  
(732) 249-8892

March 24, 2026

[pallone.house.gov](http://pallone.house.gov)

The Honorable Hal Rogers  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies  
H-310  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Grace Meng  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies  
H-310  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Meng,

Thank you for the consideration of my submitted testimony on issues that fall under the jurisdiction of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science. I write to highlight a specific issue that is threatening the livelihood of many fisheries in New Jersey and elsewhere in the country, many of which face the risk of imminent bankruptcy if no federal action is taken to alleviate it.

Through the COVID-era CARES Act, and the Fiscal Year 2021 Omnibus, Congress appropriated funds to NOAA to provide financial assistance for struggling fisheries. These funds were passed through regional fisheries commissions like the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). The Commissions then passed the money to state agencies, such as the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). NJDEP disbursed millions of dollars to fisheries across the state. They calculated the loss relative to normal revenue and paid the balance.

Fisheries were explicitly told that they would not have to return this money except in the case of fraud. Yet in 2023 the Office of the New Jersey State Comptroller pulled the rug out from these small businesses when it forced NJDEP to go back to the fisheries and revise the process for how they calculated revenue loss, entirely inconsistent with the process laid out in the CARES Act. This action resulted in dozens of fisheries now being declared “more than whole” and the consequences have been extremely destabilizing.

The direct result of the actions of the former state comptroller has created one of the greatest threats this group of small businesses has ever faced through no fault of their own. NOAA is demanding ASFMC repay the money as the initial recipient of the funds, but ASFMC does not have the funding nor authority to do so. As a result, ASFMC has sought to recoup the funding from the fisheries, who have already invested the funding into equipment and other essentials for their businesses.

As of February, there were still \$3,054,784 in claw backs outstanding, affecting 20 different fisheries. For several fisheries in New Jersey, they are trying to claw back over \$500,000 each. For others, they are trying to claw back funds from the family members of the now-deceased that took the aid during COVID. Fisheries like the Belford Seafood Cooperative located in Middletown in my district followed the rules when applying for the funding and utilized these funds in the way Congress intended. But they have told me directly that they will have no choice but to declare bankruptcy if these clawbacks proceed and they are forced to repay.

Congress passed this program to assist fisheries during the darkest moments of the COVID pandemic. Now the very people we were trying to help are facing the potential loss of their livelihoods through no fault of their own. I ask that you help right this wrong and make sure these fisheries can continue to operate.

My request is that the Committee include an appropriation to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission specifically to repay the funding NOAA is attempting to claw back, as the alternative would be the forced closure of several fisheries that are the lifeblood of the Jersey Shore. I have heard through bipartisan conversations with Congressman Jeff Van Drew, ASFMC, and the Trump Administration that ensuring the full ASFMC payment to NOAA will halt the collections process and no further actions will be taken against these fisheries.

This is an imminent threat that the Subcommittee can help resolve for these fisheries, and I urge you to please give this solution full consideration. I also stand ready to provide any additional information or answer any questions you may have on the matter.

Sincerely,

  
FRANK PALLONE JR.  
Member of Congress