

Brian Russell, Member  
Shore Thing Shellfish LLC  
PO Box 74  
Tall Timbers, MD 20690

February 27, 2022

To: Members of the Senate Environment and Transportation Committee

Re: SB580 Sewer Systems and Wastewater Treatment Plants – Water Pollution – Shellfish Harvester Restitution

Position: Support SB580 with amendments

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Dear Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the committee,

My name is Brian Russell, one of the three owners and operators of Shore Thing Shellfish LLC, a small oyster farm in Piney Point Maryland. We support SB580 Sewer Systems and Wastewater Treatment Plants – Water Pollution – Shellfish Harvester Restitution with amendments.

In 2021 our farm was directly impacted by waste water spills from the St. Mary's County Metropolitan Commission (METCOM) on two separate occasions. Because we are an aquaculture business tied to a lease in St. George Creek, there is nowhere else we could go to harvest. The first occurrence happened December 31<sup>st</sup> 2020 when a sewer line ruptured under the St. George Island bridge. On January 2<sup>nd</sup>, within hours of the Maryland Departments of the Environment (MDE), Natural Resources (DNR), and Health (MDH) being notified of the leak, we received communication from all three departments that a 21-day closure was being put on St. George creek and that we had to recall any oysters that had been sold since December 30<sup>th</sup>. That meant we lost all our sales for the month of January 2021.

The second occurrence happened October 28<sup>th</sup> 2021 when abnormally high tides caused a METCOM sewage pumpstation on St. George Island to overflow. This time we had not been notified by any department and we were unaware that the overflow had happened. We harvested oysters the beginning of the following week and sold to our biggest customer who took those oysters to Northern Virginia where they were served at three separate venues. As a result, more than two dozen people got sick. It was on November 12<sup>th</sup> 2021, when our customer reported the complaints of sicknesses to us that we reached out to MDH and subsequently found out that the overflow at the pumpstation had occurred and that the proper people at MDE, DNR, and MDH had not been notified due to a lapse in communication within MDE. We then had to once again recall any oysters sold and the St. Georges Creek was once again closed to shellfish harvest. Since this incident, even though the creek has been reopened to harvest, our sales have not recovered. Our largest customer is still reluctant to resume

buying our oysters because they want assurance that they are safe and that an incident like this won't happen again. This has resulted in a loss of tens of thousands of dollars from our business income so far and we are not sure when or if we will be able to recoup any of our losses. We hate for something like this to happen to any oyster farmer and so we ask that you give SB 580 a favorable report with amendments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brian Russell", with a stylized, cursive script.

Brian Russell