



**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB580- Sewer Systems and
Wastewater Treatment Plants - Water Pollution - Shellfish Harvester Restitution**

March 1, 2022

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **SB580** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland's Eastern Shore with 3,500 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education.

This bill will hold wastewater treatment plant operators more accountable for the environmental and health impacts caused by their illegal spills and overflows. Specifically, this bill will provide restitution in the amount of three times the economic impact endured by a shellfish harvester in an area affected by a closure resulting from a wastewater spill or overflow.

ShoreRivers supports this bill because oyster leases on the Eastern Shore are becoming more plentiful as watermen and others are recognizing oyster farming as an economic and sustainable alternative to commercial harvesting of wild oysters. Meanwhile, sewer overflows in areas like Cambridge and St. Michaels are still prevalent, and when combined overflows are happening on average over ten times a year. This number is expected to increase as intensity and frequency of rainfall increases with climate change, causing a greater threat in the future to the individuals, families, and businesses seeking an alternative and sustainable path to oyster harvesting. Requiring restitution will add a much-needed level of accountability for these wastewater treatment plants to ensure they're operating in compliance with the law and addressing any significant noncompliance as it occurs.

Because the economic and environmental impacts from wastewater spills and overflows are not subject to oyster lease holders only, ShoreRivers suggests the committee consider an amendment that also allows individuals, specifically those of lower income who are fishing for subsistence, to claim restitution when an area they commonly fish in is impacted by a wastewater spill.

For these reasons stated above, ShoreRivers urges the Committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE** report on **SB580 with amendment**.

Sincerely,

Matt Pluta
Choptank Riverkeeper, on behalf of:

ShoreRivers

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