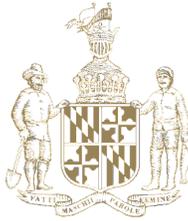


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HB Natural Resources - Oyster Spat, Shells, and Substrate

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, Vice Chair, and members of the committee. For the record, Vice Chair Crosby presenting HB1228 Natural Resources - Oyster Spat, Shells, and Substrate.

This bill will establish a number of programs, provide funding for research, and funding for capital projects in Maryland's higher education institutions. The purpose of this bill is to reach 5 billion spat-on-shell produced each year by 2025. The Oyster is not only an important part of our economy, but also our environment, and this bill seeks to restore the Oyster population in the Chesapeake Bay.

The bill will provide \$20 million in capital funding in FY24 for UMCES to build a second hatchery in Horn Point named after the late Speaker Mike Busch. It will also include \$2.5 million for infrastructure upgrades at Morgan State's PEARL Laboratory's hatchery.

HB1228 will establish a loan and grant program through the Maryland Agricultural and Resource Based Industry Development Corporation to eligible fisherman, seafood processors, and dealers. \$5 of any loan is forgiven for every bushel of shells that the loan recipient returns to DNR. The grant program will pay \$5 to the eligible participants up to a maximum of \$2000 a year.

Research into types of substrate that will benefit Oyster restoration will also be directly funded through this bill at an amount of \$500k a year in FY24 and FY25, and a new bay bottom survey will be funded in FY24-26 at \$2 million per year. The new bay bottom survey is very important because there has not been a survey since the 1970s. The state will work in conjunction with the federal government to complete this bay bottom survey.

Oyster restoration is one of the most important environmental issues in the state of Maryland and this bill will go a long way to achieving the goal of 5 billion spat-on-shell by 2025. For these reasons, I urge a favorable report on HB1228.