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Testimony in Support of  
House Bill 1228 - Natural Resources – Oysters – Spat, Shells, and Substrate  
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee  
March 04, 2022

**The Rural Maryland Council supports House Bill 1228 - Natural Resources – Oysters – Spat, Shells, and Substrate.** The bill intends to grow the oyster market in Maryland by creating new incentives such as grants for recycled oyster shells, and grants to seafood dealers. The bill also provides programs to grow the oyster population, such as researching specified issues relating to oyster substrate, creating a 10 year plan for oyster substrate needs for restoration, and setting an oyster production goal.

HB-1228 includes authorization for grants to establish or expand the business of seafood dealers that support increasing oyster shells retained in the state and returned to the Chesapeake Bay. MARBIDCO will receive a \$1 million appropriation in FY204 for MARBIDCO to administer the program. MARBIDCO is a partner of the Rural Maryland Council and created by the Council.

The bill also establishes an oyster production goal. The goal is for hatcheries in the State to be capable of producing 5 billion spat-on-shell per year. To accomplish this, there will be a \$20.0 million appropriation in the FY2024 budget for the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science to build a second oyster hatchery, and an appropriation of \$2.5 million for the Patuxent Environmental and Aquatic Research Laboratory, Morgan State University (MSU), to be used for infrastructure upgrades to support increased oyster production for research and restoration. Maryland's overall oyster population is down from 600 million market-size oysters in 1999 to about only 400 million in 2020, according to a June 2020 Maryland Oyster Stock Assessment.

The growth of the oyster population and market will benefit local rural economies. The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of House Bill 1228.

*The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.*