



Chesapeake
OYSTER ALLIANCE
10 Billion for the Bay

ADVOCATES FOR HERRING BAY | ANNAPOLIS AQUACULTURE | ANNAPOLIS MARITIME MUSEUM | ARUNDEL RIVERS FEDERATION
BLACK GIRLS DIVE FOUNDATION | BLUE OYSTER ENVIRONMENTAL | CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION | CHESAPEAKE BEACH OYSTER CULTIVATION
SOCIETY | COASTAL CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION – MARYLAND | FRIENDS OF ST. CLEMENTS BAY | LIVING CLASSROOMS FOUNDATION
MARINE SCIENCE FOUNDATION | MARK STREET VENTURES | OYSTER GIRL OYSTERS | PIRATES COVE OYSTER COMPANY
SEVERN RIVER ASSOCIATION | SHORERIVERS | TRUE CHESAPEAKE OYSTER COMPANY

House Bill 725

Oysters, Striped Bass, and Crabs - Commercial Authorizations - Suspensions and Revocations
Testimony before Environment and Transportation Committee

DATE: February 19, 2024

POSITION: **OPPOSE**

The Chesapeake Oyster Alliance is a broad coalition of 111 (and counting) non-profits, academic institutions, oyster growers, and business owners with the shared goal of adding 10 billion oysters in the Bay by the year 2025. With a focus on oyster restoration, science-based fishery management, and increased aquaculture, the Chesapeake Oyster Alliance aims to accelerate oyster recovery efforts and in so doing the recovery of Chesapeake Bay.

In its 2009 report, the Maryland Oyster Advisory Commission stated, *“there is no single factor more important to the future of ecologic restoration and aquaculture than to address and dramatically reduce ongoing illegal oyster harvesting activities.”* Oyster poaching is a significant impediment to oyster recovery. Over the past 5 years, there have been nearly 90 citations issued for oystering in sanctuaries, which represents a fraction of poachers who were caught. The statutory requirement that an individual’s authorization to catch oysters be revoked if they are found guilty of one of these five violations reflects the seriousness of these actions and are intended to serve as a strong deterrent to those who would consider skirting these regulations for monetary gain.

We, the above-listed members of the Chesapeake Oyster Alliance, **strongly OPPOSE House Bill 725** which would weaken deterrents for oyster poaching penalties and undermine oyster recovery:

House Bill 725 allows a person whose oyster authorization has been revoked to apply for reinstatement after five years and the completion of an education course. This action muddies the definition of a revocation and instead likens it to a five-year suspension, reducing the efficacy of revocation as a deterrent to poaching. Additionally, Maryland’s oyster fishery is a limited entry fishery with a lengthy waitlist. Holding revoked licenses in perpetuity due to the possibility of future reinstatement prevents those on the waitlist from being able to enter the fishery while those with revoked licenses due to poaching are allowed to re-enter despite their illegal actions.

Those who poach oysters undermine the efforts to remedy overfishing, weaken oyster recovery and threaten the future of the oyster industry. Weakening oyster poaching is a detriment to the honest efforts of watermen who comply with harvest regulations.

The Chesapeake Oyster Alliance respectfully requests an **unfavorable on House Bill 725**. Please contact COA Senior Manager, Tanner Council (tcouncil@cbf.org; 434.882.8266) with any questions.