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**Testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 674: Abandoned or Sunken Vessels and  
Waterway Improvement Fund Grants**  
Environment and Transportation Committee  
April 3, 2024

Dear Chair Korman and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT OF SB674**, on behalf of Arundel Rivers Federation. Arundel Rivers is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection, preservation, and restoration of the South, West and Rhode Rivers with over 3,500 supporters. Our mission is to work with local communities to achieve clean, fishable, and swimmable waterways for present and future generations.

**Senate Bill 674 will provide a much-needed update to existing abandoned or sunken vessel law** modernizing how the Department can contact an abandoned vessel owner by requiring contact information include mailing address, telephone number, and e-mail address for each owner of the vessel. This will ensure abandoned vessels are dealt with in a more timely and efficient manner. Additionally, this bill will create funding for historic preservation grants for our waterways such as making much needed updates to our historic lighthouses such as Thomas Point Lighthouse, which marks the entrance shoals to the South River. Finally, this bill will establish a program where owners may turn in vessels to the Department. This will be extremely helpful to owners who may have inherited a derelict boat or are unable to financially address a sinking or derelict boat, thus hopefully making it one step easier for the Department to remove the vessel.

As South, West, and Rhode Riverkeeper, I often receive reports from concerned citizens about abandoned or sunken vessels within our local waterways. The process of having those vessels addressed or removed by the Department has been frustrating, lengthy, and often non-successful despite the vessel clearly being an environmental hazard, derelict, and abandoned. In one particular example, I was contacted on my *first day* on the job as the South, West, and Rhode Riverkeeper in October 2022 about an anchored partially sunken vessel on the South River that was presenting environmental hazard concerns. Despite my efforts to also reach out to the Department of Natural Resources, Natural Resource Police, and even elected officials, it took 11 months and private donations to eventually have the vessel removed. In this particular case, the owner of the vessel did not have a permanent land address and thus the Department was unable to contact them via certified mail alone.

Abandoned and sunken vessels present navigational and environmental hazards, and the current protocols and regulations are simply not sufficient in addressing all potentially abandoned or sunken vessels. Arundel Rivers Federation strongly supports any effort to better protect our waterways. SB674 will give more tools to the Department to adequately assess sunken and abandoned vessels and we respectfully request a **FAVORABLE REPORT on SB674**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elle Bassett".

Elle Bassett  
South, West and Rhode Riverkeeper  
Arundel Rivers Federation