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Susan O'Neill, Chair

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Testimony in Support of
House Bill 655 - Environment - State Wetlands - Shoreline Stabilization Measures
House Environment and Transportation Committee
February 21, 2024

The Rural Maryland Council supports House Bill 655 – Environment – State Wetlands – Shoreline Stabilization Measures. This bill prohibits the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) from exempting a person from the general requirement to use nonstructural shoreline stabilization methods when protecting property from erosion solely on the basis that the person is replacing an existing structural shoreline stabilization measure with the same or similar type of structural shoreline stabilization measure. The bill also explicitly authorizes the Tidal Wetlands Compensation Fund to be used to provide grant funding for the replacement of structural shoreline stabilization measures with nonstructural shoreline stabilization measures.

A living shoreline is a protected and stabilized coastal edge made of natural materials such as plants, sand, or rock. Unlike concrete seawalls or other hard structures, living shorelines promote the growth of plants and animals, making them a sustainable choice. These shorelines provide natural resilience to communities near the waterfront and serve as habitat for wildlife. They are also known as nature-based, green, or soft shorelines and are an innovative and cost-effective technique for coastal management.

With a portion of Rural Maryland being located along the coastline, it is important to not bring any hinderance or hardships to those trying to protect their properties along the shorelines. The bill goes further to create a fund that can provide grant funding for what can be an expensive cost to the average Marylander. It would give ability to the property owner to turn what could be a decaying structural shoreline into a living shoreline, which would also the properties around it as well as the natural habitats and ecosystem nearby.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully asks for your favorable support of House Bill 655.

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.