



2/12/24

**Testimony in Favor with Amendments of HB293–
State Boat Act - Abandoned or Sunken Recreational Vessels - Identification and Removal**

To Chair Korman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **HB293** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland’s Eastern Shore with more than 2,500 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education. As the Chester Riverkeeper, I work to protect the river and its tributaries from pollution, including illegal marine discharge, and environmental hazards from sinking or abandoned vessels.

In fall of 2023, an unattended vessel sank in the upper Chester River, just outside Chestertown. This vessel posed a navigational hazard, and its batteries, bilge, and fuel tanks all sank below the waterline, impacting the health of the Chester and shallow water habitats near the sunken vessel. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) removed the boat after a period of weeks. However, the damage to water quality and local ecosystems had already been sustained. **This pollution event was entirely preventable as the boat had been at anchor and unattended for close to a year. ShoreRivers supports HB293 for giving authority to DNR to seize a vessel that: “Has remained anchored and unattended in the same location for more than 60 days.**

ShoreRivers also offers the following amendment for the committee’s consideration, to strengthen environmental protections for our waterways:

“FOR THE PURPOSES OF DETERMINING WHETHER A RECREATIONAL 6 VESSEL MEETS THE CRITERIA FOR AN ABANDONED OR SUNKEN VESSEL UNDER 7 SUBSECTION (A)(2)(II) OR (III) OF THIS SECTION, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL 8 CONSIDER AND DOCUMENT:

(6) IF THE VESSEL PRESENTS A POTENTIAL HEALTH OR ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARD.

This language is taken directly from a previous section in the existing regulations for “abandoned vessels or vessels found adrift,” and should be also considered for this legislation.

We commend Delegate Arentz for bringing this legislation forward—we rely on the state’s swift action to remove hazardous vessels and protect the waterways and wildlife habitat across Maryland. Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to this Committee giving **HB293 a favorable report with our recommended amendment.**

Sincerely,

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper on behalf of [ShoreRivers](https://shorerivers.org).

ShoreRivers

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper

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