



**Testimony in Support of House Bill 655 –
Environment – State Wetlands – Shoreline Stabilization**

February 21, 2024

Dear Chairman Korman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support of HB 655**, 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.

At ShoreRivers, shoreline erosion is one of the most common reasons a community member reaches out for consultation from a Riverkeeper. In many cases, living shorelines can be a beneficial solution, both for the homeowner, and for the health of the waterway. However, the cost of implementation is prohibitively high due to fuel and supply costs, and also the intensive permitting process. As a result, many homeowners seek waivers to implement armored shorelines or do nothing at all. Homeowners can also currently be granted a waiver to replace a failing bulkhead with a new bulkhead, rather than implement a more environmentally-friendly practice.

HB 655 seeks to curb the widespread issuance of waivers that allow homeowners to replace existing hardened shoreline practices like bulkheads with the same practice, and creates a fund for grants to convert degraded hardened shorelines into living shorelines or other nonstructural shoreline stabilization measures.

Armored shorelines provide no beneficial habitat for local fish populations. In fact, a recent NOAA study identifies that within a 1,000ft shoreline, if 30% or greater of that shoreline is armored, it will negatively impact fish reproduction— a detriment to the biodiversity of the Chesapeake and to our local fishing economies. Also, the lifespan of an armored shoreline is significantly less than a living shoreline. As impacts of climate change increase, rising tides will spill over bulkheads and riprap, causing them to degrade and collapse. On the low-lying Eastern Shore, an area of Maryland that will likely be impacted first and hardest by sea level rise, it is imperative that we implement the most resilient and dynamic shorelines to protect our communities.

Living shorelines provide important habitat to estuarian life found in the Chesapeake, as well as protection from flooding and runoff— these benefits far outweigh anything provided by armored alternatives. For these reasons we urge the committee **to adopt a favorable report for HB 655.**

Sincerely,

Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper on behalf of ShoreRivers

ShoreRivers

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