

Tuesday, February 24, 2026

TO: Senator Guy Guzzone, Chair of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, and Committee Members

FROM: Michelle Dietz, Director of Government Relations, The Nature Conservancy; Amy Jacobs, Chesapeake Bay Program Director, The Nature Conservancy

POSITION: Support with Amendments SB558 Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Established

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports with amendments SB558 offered by Senator Bailey. For the past two decades, the world has looked to the Chesapeake Bay to learn what's possible in oyster restoration. No effort in the world matches the scale of what has been accomplished here, and TNC has been proud to support and invest in oyster restoration along with many others during this time. SB 558 seeks to codify an existing Memorandum of Understanding between the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Port of Baltimore, which would provide \$2 million in annual funding for oyster replenishment activities in the public oyster fishery.

TNC supports the oyster industry across the state. We have a history of working across sectors to leverage private, state and federal funding for its benefit. Harvesting and restoration efforts must be balanced in order to realize the many benefits oysters provide to the Chesapeake Bay, including improving the Bay's health, strengthening our state and local economies, and enhancing Maryland's culture.

TNC recommends that this committee adopt the amendments offered by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation to this bill. These amendments seek to broaden the scope of SB 558 to allow DNR to utilize Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program funding to advance oyster replenishment activities on state sanctuaries. DNR is currently reviewing oyster management across these state sanctuaries and as a member of the Oyster Advisory Commission, TNC would like to see flexibility built into this bill to allow DNR to direct funding where it is needed most. Sanctuaries improve recreational and commercial fishing in the Bay by providing persistent habitat for blue crabs, striped bass, white perch and other important finfish species. Oysters within sanctuaries can produce larvae that benefit areas beyond the sanctuary, including adjacent public fishery areas. In this way, oyster restoration work also increases harvest opportunities. We support the following amendments to this legislation:

On Page 1, Line 21, strike “PROPAGATION” and insert “RESEARCH, DEMONSTRATION, RESTORATION”

On Page 2, line 10, strike “(D)” and Insert, “(D) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL DRAFT AN ANNUAL WORK PLAN FOR THE PROGRAM DETAILING THE EXPENDITURE OF

FUNDS. THE WORK PLAN WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE ON THE DEPARTMENT’S WEBSITE IN ADDITION TO BEING SHARED WITH RELEVANT ADVISORY BODIES WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT.”

The Nature Conservancy commends Senators Bailey on introducing SB558, which will codify funding for oyster restoration and encourages the consideration of amendment language that would allow for a more expansive use of funding by DNR for restoration efforts. **Therefore, we urge a favorable with amendments report on SB 558.**