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## Testimony in **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS – Senate Bill 558: Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Established**

Budget and Taxation Committee  
February 24, 2026

Dear Chair Guzzone and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT OF SB558**, on behalf of Arundel Rivers Federation. Deeply rooted in the South, West, and Rhode Rivers, Arundel Rivers Federation heals and protects our waterways and champions clean water across Maryland. Our vision is healthy waterways for all, and we achieve our mission through restoration, education and outreach, and Riverkeeper programs.

Senate Bill 558 codifies a program between the Port of Baltimore and the Department of Natural Resources to provide \$2 million in funding annually for oyster replenishment activities in the state public oyster fishery.

Oysters are critical natural resources that filter our waterways, support our local watermen and economy, and provide habitat for other aquatic life. Arundel Rivers strongly supports any efforts or programs that intend to boost native oyster populations in the Chesapeake, as populations remain at critically low levels compared to historic populations. Arundel Rivers has been supporting community-based oyster restoration through the Marylanders Grow Oyster Program for over a decade on the South River.

As a current Commissioner on the Oyster Advisory Commission, I am currently working with my fellow Commissioners and the Department of Natural Resources to identify how we can address underinvested oyster sanctuaries throughout the state. **This bill could address that gap if it were amended to also include supporting oyster restoration.** Arundel Rivers is supportive of restoring the original intent of this partnership between the Port of Baltimore and the Department first established in the 1990s, which gave DNR the discretion to **utilize funds for restoration, research, surveys, and replenishment for the public fishery.**

Arundel Rivers Federation wholeheartedly supports investing in our native oyster populations, which will result in better water quality, a stronger economy, and enhanced habitat, and we respectfully request a **FAVORABLE REPORT on SB558.**

Sincerely,

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

Elle Bassett  
South, West, and Rhode Riverkeeper  
Arundel Rivers Federation