



# CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

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## Senate Bill 558 Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Established

**Date:** February 24, 2026

**To:** Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

**Position:** **Favorable with Amendment**

**From:** Dr. Allison Colden,  
MD Executive Director

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS SENATE BILL 558 WITH AMENDMENTS**. As drafted, SB 558 codifies an existing memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Port of Baltimore and the Department of Natural Resources which provides \$2 million in funding annually for oyster replenishment activities in the public oyster fishery.

The first iteration of this agreement was ratified in 1996 as mitigation for activities in and around the Port of Baltimore that could have impacts on oyster populations in the Upper Bay and tributaries. For many years, the funding was utilized for restoration, research, surveys, and replenishment activities which benefitted the public fishery, the Bay ecosystem, and the public. Each year, DNR prepared a work plan which was presented to the Sport Fisheries and Tidal Fisheries Advisory Committees for their review and feedback. These advisory committees represent a wide swath of stakeholders with an interest in Maryland's oyster resource.

Over the years, later versions of the MOU iteratively restricted the uses of the funds, with the most recent version requiring at least \$925,000 annually to be used exclusively for public fishery replenishment activities under the advisement of the County Oyster Committees. County Oyster Committees are comprised solely of watermen who reside and work in a specific county, limiting the perspectives and input to a narrow group. Around the same time, public presentations on the use of the funds and annual work plan also ceased, leaving the public in the dark about how funds were being spent.

DNR is currently reviewing its oyster management program to determine how to best address underinvestment in some state oyster sanctuaries, several of which are located in the Upper Bay near the Port. If the scope of this bill were broadened to allow DNR discretion on how best to spend the funds to support the state's oyster resources, similar to how the fund was used previously, this could be a potential boon to sanctuaries where the State has previously lacked resources to invest. It would also provide flexibility year-to-year to address priorities of importance to all oyster stakeholders. Otherwise, this bill codifies the narrow scope of the current MOU and misses a key opportunity to ensure public dollars are spent in a way that benefits the Bay and the state's oyster resource through a transparent process that accounts for multiple perspectives.

**CBF urges the Committee's to report FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS on SB 558.**

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at [mstegman@cbf.org](mailto:mstegman@cbf.org).

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*The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 200,000 members and e-subscribers, including 71,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.*

**Suggested Amendments:**

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.”