



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony for House Bill 947 -- **Department of Natural Resources - Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License – Alterations – FWA**

Good afternoon, Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee.

My name is Andrew Gold. I'm an intern for Delegate Sheree Sample-Hughes and a student at the University of Maryland, College Park. I'm pleased to present **HB 947** on behalf of Delegate Sample-Hughes, and I request this committee to adopt a favorable report with amendments on the bill.

The invasive Blue Catfish is spreading exponentially in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, wreaking havoc on the local ecosystem. Their **large size, insatiable appetite, and lack of natural predators** have created an imminent threat to local populations of bay aquatic life, such as the iconic **Maryland Blue Crab**¹.

Conversations with advocates from the Watermen's Caucus, including Robert T. Brown, have identified this as a crucial issue facing the Chesapeake and its fisheries. The way to mitigate this problem is through supporting and encouraging the harvest and consumption of blue catfish. However, the current legal gill net size of up to **3^{1/2} inches** is too small to effectively harvest the fish and keep up with market demand.

HB 947 aims to equip watermen in Maryland with the proper tools to maximize their harvest of Blue Catfish and curb the spread of the invasive species with an amendment launching **the Invasive Blue Catfish Gill Net Pilot Program**. The goals of this program are as follows.

- Increase commercial harvest by updating the max gill net size permitted to catch blue catfish to up to **7-inch** mesh.
- **Study and designate areas** within the Chesapeake Bay in which gill nets to pose the lowest risk of bycatch to prevent harm to nontarget aquatic life.
- Analyze license fee structure under the program.

HB 947 provides a way to **reduce and control** the population of Blue Catfish in the Bay by **increasing commercial harvests** and stimulating one of Maryland's most important

¹ (University of Maryland Extension, 2020)

industries, without causing unnecessary collateral damage. I want to thank both DNR and the Waterman's caucus for working to create a responsible, environmentally conscious, and economically beneficial approach to a critical issue facing the Chesapeake Bay, which is why I humbly ask this committee for a favorable report with amendments on the bill.