

CHERYL C. KAGAN
Legislative District 17
Montgomery County

—
Vice Chair
Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee

—
Joint Audit Committee
Joint Committee on Federal Relations



Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Suite 2 West
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
301-858-3134 · 410-841-3134
800-492-7122 Ext. 3134
Fax 301-858-3665 · 410-841-3665
Cheryl.Kagan@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**SB629: Natural Resources - SAV Protection Zones and Hydraulic Clam Dredges
(Aquatic Habitat Protection Act)
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
February 25, 2020, 1:00 PM**

Maryland pledged to increase Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) beds to 130,000 acres by 2025 as part of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement of 2014. Currently, there are 108,000 acres of SAV in the Bay, a 4 percent increase from 2017. The current system used by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to map SAV is not sufficient enough to meet these goals, to protect these beds and can be difficult for watermen to use.

SB629 would help protect SAV by requiring DNR to make reasonable changes to their current system, including more frequent updates to SAV Protection Zones, and the implementation of buffers to further protect the grasses from machinery. The bill would not fundamentally change the technical methods used by DNR to map SAV Protection Zones.

Grass beds are already mapped annually by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS). The DNR simply has to codify the data that is already available to them. This bill would also remove the requirement to place buoys at all SAV Protection Zones. Many locations are not suitable for buoys due to water depth and move frequently. SB629 would allow DNR to mark only the beds that are most susceptible to damage from human interference at their discretion, which saves time and resources.

Annual updates provide watermen with the latest available data. This will help identify existing zones that no longer qualify for protection, opening the area to clamming. SB629 requires the DNR to provide online maps of the SAV, which gives watermen access to an easy to use visual format, rather than the current system of listed coordinates. Protecting SAV means a healthier Chesapeake Bay, which creates more robust fisheries, benefiting watermen in the long term.

SB629 will assist Maryland in reaching this habitat goal by strengthening SAV Protection Zones, taking us one step closer to saving the Chesapeake Bay. After discussions with the Department of Natural Resources, I have introduced an amendment to remove the study required by this bill.

I urge a favorable report on SB629 with the amendment.