

DATE: February 24, 2020

TO: The Honorable Paul Pinsky, Chairman

The Honorable Cheryl Kagan, Vice-Chair

FROM: Jim Reihl, President, Maryland Oystermen's Association

RE: Opposition to Senate Bill 948-Natural Resources—Commercial Oyster Authorizations-Requirements

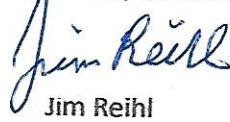
The Maryland Oystermen's Association, representing the interests of the State's licensed oystermen, respectfully opposes Senate Bill 948 for the reasons set forth below. This legislation would remove the authority to harvest oysters from the list of activities under an unlimited tidal fish license. For the license year beginning September 1, 2020, a license could only be renewed if the person had an oyster authorization or unlimited tidal fish license in the prior year and paid the oyster surcharge for the year 2018-19 or 2019-20. For the license year beginning September 1, 2021, the license could only be renewed if the oyster surcharge were paid in the immediately preceding year.

The Association understands the goal of this legislation to be reducing the number of oyster harvesters by not allowing them to obtain oyster authorizations if they did not use this authority in prior years, essentially targeting those who only occasionally harvest oysters and do not depend on the water for their livelihood. However, the Association does not believe this is the appropriate time to take this step, and further believes that the effects of this legislation will not be limited to the intended group.

As the General Assembly knows, in 2019 Senate Bill 830 was adopted which established the Advisory Commission (OAC). The veto of that legislation was just overridden on January 30, 2020, and the OAC will be starting its work this year. The OAC is given a broad charge of developing recommendations for managing the oyster fishery, and the Department of Natural Resources is to provide regular reports on the OAC's work to the General Assembly. The Association believes the OAC should be allowed to do its work before the license reductions set out in SB 948 are considered.

In addition, SB 948 is not narrowly tailored to target only the occasional oyster harvester. Instead, it also captures those who depend on the water for their living but may not have obtained an oyster authorization in the last year. Many watermen obtain the unlimited tidal fish license so that they have access to multiple fisheries, but in a given year may not obtain the oyster authorization. That person is still very much dependent on the water for a living and should not be shut out of the oyster fishery just because the authorization was not obtained in the last year. The other unintended effect of this is that it will force waterman into other fisheries, perhaps raising concerns of overfishing there. For these reasons, the Association opposes Senate Bill 948.

Respectfully submitted,



Jim Reihl

MOA BOD Members

Jim Mullin

Executive Director

Bunky Chance

Jimmy Kline

Jimmy Reihl

Chuckie White

Wayne Wilson

"The Bay's A Big Place
And There's Room For
Everybody"