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**RECREATIONAL ANGLERS
WORKING TO CONSERVE, PROMOTE, AND ENHANCE MARYLAND'S
MARINE RESOURCES**

January 20, 2021

To: Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Chairman
Honorable Dana Stein, Vice Chairman
Honorable Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

Re: **House Bill 145** Unlawful Taking of Oysters from Submerged Land Leases,
Aquaculture Leases, and Water Column Leases – Penalties

CCA Maryland Position: Support

The enforcement of Maryland's natural resources laws and regulations is of the utmost importance in ensuring that our shared resources of the Chesapeake Bay are protected in a meaningful way.

The hard-working officers of the Maryland Natural Resources Police(NRP) take to the woods and waters of Maryland each and every day to watch of these shared resources. With such a broad portfolio, and massive area to police, NRP officers can only cover a small portion of Maryland's waterways. This means that strong penalties for those who violate natural resource laws must stand as a deterrent to such actions. All too often, natural resources cases that are tried, share a docket with more serious crimes, and offenders are often let off with very limited penalties if any at all.

CCA Maryland believes that HB 145 will provide a deterrent for those who may consider poaching from oyster aquaculture operations in Maryland and more importantly, those who may sell the illegally obtained shellfish.

For more than a decade, Maryland's oyster aquaculture industry has grown into an important economic driver in numerous portions of the state and provided valuable jobs to many. Oyster aquaculture has expanded to over 450 leases and 7,300 acres in Maryland waters of the Bay.

Aquaculture oysters also provide important ecosystem services like filtering water, providing habitat for other animals, and in some cases, spawning to produce future generations of oysters. While aquaculture operations can be seen as a new player on the block or in the creek, CCA Maryland recognizes the importance and value of such businesses to other user groups.

Maryland oyster aquaculture companies invest directly into shellfish beds, bringing value to their local economies and ecosystems. It is vital to support these investments with strong deterrents to theft, and to provide confidence in the industry that far off places in Maryland are protected by the law.

CCA Maryland respectfully urges a favorable report for HB 145