



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony for HJ0004: Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission - Atlantic Menhaden -
Population Evaluation and Prohibition on Commercial Reduction Fishing**

Rules and Executive Nominations Committee

Good afternoon Chair, Vice Chair, and distinguished members of the committee. I am Del. Brian Crosby and it's an honor to present House Joint Resolution 4 entitled Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission - Atlantic Menhaden - Population Evaluation and Prohibition on Commercial Reduction Fishing.

The Chesapeake Bay is one of the most important nurseries for Atlantic Menhaden, and they serve a vital role in our regional ecosystem and economy. Specifically, Menhaden are a major food source for many predator species – such as rockfish, bluefish, weakfish, and crabs, as well as osprey and eagles. Since the 1990s, the population of Menhaden has dropped substantially, and subsequent commercial harvests of rockfish, bluefish, and weakfish have dropped 34%, 76%, and 98%, respectively. Over a similar time frame, Maryland has seen our number of commercial fisherman drop 32%. A major source of this decline is the localized overharvesting of Menhaden by Omega Protein, a Canadian company which uses spotter planes and purse nets for the purposes of reduction fishery. It should be noted that Maryland does not permit these practices, so the resolution would not impact our local watermen – its primary focus is Omega Protein's Virginia operations in our shared waterways, which harvest 71% of the Menhaden allowable catch from the entire Atlantic Coast.

In response to these troubling developments, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission first placed limits on Menhaden harvest in 2006, and revised them lower in 2017 to reflect contemporary data, but the population trends remain worrisome and Omega Protein's compliance with these limits is shaky. In 2019, they were cited for a violation of the limit by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. As a result, I have introduced this resolution to request that the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission consider a prohibition of commercial reduction fishing of Atlantic Menhaden until populations reach a sustainable level. We cannot allow foreign companies to directly harm Maryland's watermen.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to offer a favorable report on House Joint Resolution 4, and I'm happy to take any questions at this time.