



**WRITTEN STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE OYSTER RECOVERY PARTNERSHIP
HOUSE ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
HOUSE BILL 593: DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES – OYSTER SHELL DREDGING – PERMIT
APPLICATION
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2022**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee:

The Oyster Recovery Partnership (ORP) respectfully asks the Committee to return an unfavorable report on House Bill 593 as currently written.

ORP is a 28-year-old nonprofit organization headquartered in Annapolis. Our mission is to increase the environmental and economic value of Maryland's oyster population and we work closely with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Maryland's commercial seafood industry, and the oyster aquaculture industry to build and rebuild oyster reefs in the Chesapeake Bay. Since its founding in 1994, ORP has planted more than nine billion juvenile oysters on sanctuary reefs and public oyster bars.

The Oyster Recovery Partnership is under contract with the Maryland DNR to help execute Maryland's long-term oyster restoration strategy. That includes large-scale oyster planting on sanctuary reefs as well as placing shell and seed oysters on public reefs open to commercial harvest. Recycling and reusing natural oyster shells is vital to the success of these efforts.

House Bill 593 directs the Maryland DNR to pursue permits to dredge buried oyster shells from 27 existing oyster reefs. The bill mandates that shell dredged from these reefs be used solely for the purpose of rebuilding public oyster reefs identified by local County Oyster Committees and ORP's Board of Directors. Because ORP is a state contractor, we believe participating in the decision-making process about which oyster reefs are selected for enhancement presents a potential conflict of interest. Therefore, it is prudent that the ORP ask for an unfavorable report on House Bill 593 as currently written.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this legislative process. We look forward to continuing to work with the Maryland General Assembly on these important public policy matters.

Sincerely,

Paul Schurick
Director of Partnerships
Oyster Recovery Partnership