



Wes Moore, Governor  
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor  
Josh Kurtz, Acting Secretary  
Allan Fisher, Deputy Secretary

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February 24, 2023

**BILL NUMBER: House Bill 696 – First Reader**

**SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources - Black Bass Conservation Fund - Establishment**

**DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

**EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION**

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The Department supports House Bill 696 with amendments. The revenue would be used for stocking black bass, enhancing habitat, supporting conservation during black bass tournaments, and supporting scientific research related to conservation of the resource. Black bass is a generic term that references largemouth bass and smallmouth bass in Maryland as well as other freshwater bass species in North America (but *not* striped bass or black sea bass).

Current stocking projects support the highest quality fisheries but do not produce enough black bass to grow or develop lesser fisheries in Maryland’s portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Stocking may not always be useful for growing a fishery. Habitat enhancement projects like mini reef balls and freshwater reef development can help aggregate existing fish and offer more enjoyable fishing experiences for anglers. Other habitat enhancement projects may include reducing trash accumulation, placement of large woody debris, or planting riparian buffers along stream edges.

The Department currently permits and promotes hundreds of black bass tournaments in Maryland waters. The department has worked even harder to support conservation-minded catch-and-release practices during black bass tournaments. Each year, the department has awarded support for supplies for better handling practices during youth-oriented fishing tournaments. These funds remain extremely limited, contingent on available funding, and thus would greatly benefit from an alternative source of revenue.

Finally, money may also be used to support scientific research related to conservation of the resource. The department has developed an interjurisdictional plan to monitor abundance of black bass on the Potomac River with biologists from Maryland, Washington D.C., Virginia, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission. This long-term monitoring project relies on anglers reporting tagged bass.

The Department suggests two technical amendments. The Black Bass Conservation Fund should be added to the list of exempted funds under State Finance and Procurement Article, Section 6-226 as no interest from the fund shall be accrued to the General Fund of the State. This makes it consistent with other special funds for state fisheries.

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The Department also suggests that text be added to ensure the State Treasurer invests the money of the fund in the same manner as other state money may be invested and any interest earnings of the fund shall be credited to the fund. This text is also consistent with existing text in other statutes relating to fisheries funds.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

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The concept of the fund was recommended by the Department's Black Bass Advisory Committee (BBAC) during its meetings over the past two years.

### **BILL EXPLANATION**

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The bill would establish a voluntary donation program for black bass management. The fund, Black Bass Conservation Fund, would provide the legal method for the department to process donations made by citizens for use in black bass management.

BY:

(To be offered in the Environment and Transportation Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO HOUSE BILL 696  
(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, in line 6, after “Fund;” insert “requiring interest of the Fund to be credited to the Fund”; and after line 16 insert:

“By repealing and reenacting, with amendments,

Article – State Finance and Procurement

Section 6-226(a)(2)(ii)170. and 171.

Annotated Code of Maryland Department

(2021 Replacement Volume and 2022 Supplement)

By adding to

Article – State Finance and Procurement

Section 6-226(a)(2)(ii)172.

Annotated Code of Maryland Department

(2021 Replacement Volume and 2022 Supplement)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 4, at line 1, strike “two” and substitute “**THREE**”; after line 21, insert:

**“(3) INTEREST EARNINGS”;**

in line 23, strike “(3)” and substitute “**(4)**”; after line 24, insert:

**“(G) (1) THE STATE TREASURER SHALL INVEST THE MONEY OF THE FUND IN THE SAME MANNER AS OTHER STATE MONEY MAY BE INVESTED.**

**(2) ANY INTEREST EARNINGS OF THE FUND SHALL BE CREDITED TO THE FUND.”;**

and in line 25, strike “(G)” and substitute “**(H)**”.

AMENDMENT NO. 3

On page 5, after line 2, insert:

**“Article – State Finance and Procurement**

6–226.

(a) (2) (ii) The provisions of subparagraph (i) of this paragraph do not apply to the following funds:

170. the Cannabis Public Health Fund; [and]

171. the Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund; AND

172. THE BLACK BASS CONSERVATION FUND”.