

*Susan O'Neill, Chair*

*Charlotte Davis, Executive Director*

Testimony in Support of  
Senate Bill 386 – Certified Local Farm and Fish Program – Establishment  
Heath and Government Operations Committee  
March 22, 2023

The Rural Maryland Council **supports** the amendments made to Senate Bill 386 – Certified Local Farm and Fish Program– Establishment. The purpose of this bill (1) renames the Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program to be the Certified Local Farm and Fish Program; (2) expands the program’s purpose to include preferences for the purchase of food made from specified invasive species; (3) adds an annual reporting requirement; and (4) makes conforming changes. The bill takes effect July 1, 2023

According to [www.fisheries.noaa.gov](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov), the Chesapeake Bay is the nation’s largest estuary at 64,000 square miles and produces approximately 500 million pounds of seafood each year, supporting jobs in both commercial and recreational fishing and bolstering the regional economy. This estuary is under threat due to an invasive fish species known as the blue catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*). According to [www.chesapeakebay.net](http://www.chesapeakebay.net) this species has the potential to cause substantial harm to the Chesapeake Bay food web as it has a long lifespan and an expansive diet, which can include many native species that call the Bay their home such as menhaden and blue crabs. In August 2020, the Chesapeake Bay Program developed the Invasive Catfish Management Strategy that included a commercial fishery and marketing strategy to increase consumer awareness and market demand of wild-caught blue catfish from the Bay.

This bill will bolster this strategy as the Certified Local Farm Enterprise and Chesapeake Invasive Species Provider Program encourages state agencies, including public four-year universities, to achieve an overall goal of purchasing 20% of their food from this Program. Additionally, it will allow this entity to access the Certified Local Farm Enterprise Food Aggregation Grant Fund within the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO). This program focuses on food aggregation, storage, processing, and distribution sites across the State through grants and near-equity investments. This bill will advance efforts to target, remove, process, and market blue catfish from the Chesapeake Bay.

The Rural Maryland Council supports and encourages steps taken to promote a healthier and bountiful Chesapeake Bay. The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of the amended Senate Bill 386.

*The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county, and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county, and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.*