

*Susan O'Neill, Chair*

*Charlotte Davis, Executive Director*

Testimony in Support of  
House Bill 63 – Certified Local Farm and Chesapeake Invasive Species Provider Program – Establishment  
Health and Government Operations Committee  
February 15, 2023

The Rural Maryland Council **supports** House Bill 63 – Certified Local Farm and Chesapeake Invasive Species Provider Program – Establishment. The purpose of this bill is to expand the Certified Local Farm Enterprise program to include the Chesapeake Invasive Species Provider Program. The bill defines a certified Chesapeake invasive species as a finfish species that is 1) ranked as high priority in the Maryland Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plan; and 2) harvested from the Chesapeake Bay or its tributaries.

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 House Bill 63.

*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.*