

LORIG CHARKOUDIAN  
Legislative District 20  
Montgomery County

Economic Matters Committee

*Subcommittees*

Public Utilities

Chair, Unemployment Insurance



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 63- CERTIFIED LOCAL FARM AND CHESAPEAKE INVASIVE SPECIES PROVIDER PROGRAM-  
ESTABLISHMENT

TESTIMONY OF DELEGATE LORIG CHARKOUDIAN

FEBRUARY 15, 2023

Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Kelly, and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

Blue catfish is delicious, nutritious, and healthy to eat.<sup>1</sup> This species is native to the Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, and Rio Grande river basins. It was introduced to the Chesapeake in the 1970s and has now become invasive- making up more than 70% of the fish biomass in some of our region's rivers and tributaries.

Blue catfish pose a significant and expanding threat to the Chesapeake Bay. This invasive species decimates local populations of native seafood because they feed on native species such as blue crabs, striped bass, and oysters. Loss of native species is a threat to the livelihoods of local watermen and affects essential ecosystem services- such as the water filtration and cleaning carried out by bay oysters. Restoring the bay and protecting local, native species is a state imperative.<sup>2</sup>

One method of managing, with the hope of eliminating, invasive species is to increase the demand for these species to be captured and eaten.<sup>3</sup>

This bill helps strengthen the demand and market for invasive species, such as the blue catfish, from the Chesapeake region by incentivizing state-run institutions to purchase them. It also helps certified providers access grant funds to improve their businesses and get the product to market using food aggregation, storage, processing, and distribution sites across the state.

This legislation will create a local market for these types of invasive fish- transforming them from an economic burden to an asset. It will also support restoration of the Chesapeake Bay.

Therefore, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 63.

<sup>1</sup> NOAA Fisheries. "Blue Catfish: Invasive and Delicious". 20 October 2020.

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/blue-catfish-invasive-and-delicious>

<sup>2</sup> State Agency Panel on Chesapeake Bay Restoration presentation to House Environment and Transportation Committee. [slides] 1 February 2023.

[https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/meeting\\_material/2023/ent%20-%20133197355839554160%20-%20Bay%20Briefing%20for%20House%20E&T%20and%20Senate%20EEE%20Hearings%20Feb%201&2%202023.pdf](https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/meeting_material/2023/ent%20-%20133197355839554160%20-%20Bay%20Briefing%20for%20House%20E&T%20and%20Senate%20EEE%20Hearings%20Feb%201&2%202023.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Bermuda Institute for Ocean Sciences. "How about Lionfish for Lunch?" (2017).

<http://www.bios.edu/currents/how-about-lionfish-for-lunch>