



**Testimony in OPPOSITION of Senate Bill 837
Oyster Restoration - Use of Federal Funds - Prohibition**

2/28/2025

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and esteemed members of the Committee,

On behalf of ShoreRivers, I am writing to express our position in **OPPOSITION to SB837 - Prohibition on Federal Funds for Oyster Restoration in Sanctuaries**. As a science-based advocacy and restoration organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the waterways of Maryland's Eastern Shore, we urge the Committee to **issue an unfavorable report on SB837**.

This legislation would be a significant setback to Maryland's oyster recovery efforts, undermining long-term restoration goals and jeopardizing the progress made in restoring oyster reefs in the Chesapeake Bay.

Federal funding has been crucial to Maryland's oyster restoration success, supporting the rehabilitation of over 1,000 acres of reef with a remarkably high success rate. Collaborative efforts between federal partners—including NOAA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers—alongside state agencies, scientists, and conservation groups have made Maryland a national leader in oyster restoration. These initiatives have led to measurable improvements in oyster density, biomass, and reef health, as confirmed by the 2022-2023 Interagency Workgroup Monitoring Report.

A resident of Bozman, on the Harris Creek oyster sanctuary, has this to say about the efficacy of oyster restoration. *"I've lived at this location since 1986. Oysters in the flats are larger, forming more clusters, and standing. In the past, regular strip mining of the shallows by commercial harvesters kept most oysters around the 2-4" range. Oysters 5" (and larger to 7") are very prevalent today. Spat on the riprap are more prevalent as well, though this past ice has scraped them off a bit. See attached pictures, taken 12/6/24."*

ShoreRivers

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director
Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper
Ben Ford, Miles Wye Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper



However, this work is far from complete. Oyster reefs provide vital ecological benefits, including improving water quality, supporting marine life, strengthening coastal resilience, and boosting the local economy. Cutting off funding at this critical stage would not only halt progress but could also reverse the gains achieved through years of investment, research, and community engagement.

In 2023, **1.7 billion juvenile oysters** were planted on sanctuary and public oyster reefs in the Chesapeake Bay, surpassing an ambitious annual goal and setting a new record. This milestone brings the total number of oysters planted to nearly **7 billion since the state launched its large-scale oyster restoration strategy in 2014**, in collaboration with numerous partners, including those at the federal level.

Oysters for the five large-scale restoration tributaries are primarily grown at the **University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science's Horn Point Laboratory oyster hatchery** in Cambridge. As one of the largest hatcheries on the East Coast, it produces oyster larvae for research, restoration, aquaculture, and educational initiatives. **Restricting federal support would severely impact key institutions like UMCES Horn Point Oyster Hatchery, driving up prices and demand for oyster larvae and spat-on-shell for all sources.**

With Maryland already facing a budget deficit, the state cannot afford to reject essential federal resources that have been instrumental in achieving restoration goals.

For these reasons, I urge you to oppose **SB837** and continue supporting Maryland's leadership in oyster restoration. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'BF', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Benjamin Ford, Miles-Wye Riverkeeper, on behalf of ShoreRivers