



Testimony before the
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 4, 2025

Senate Bill 837
Oyster Restoration – Use of Federal Funds – Prohibition
Position: **OPPOSE**

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

We, the undersigned organizations, respectfully request an **unfavorable** report from the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee on Senate Bill 837. This bill would prohibit the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) from using federal funding for oyster restoration projects in Maryland's oyster sanctuaries.

Federal investments have played a pivotal role in Maryland's oyster restoration success. Through the end of calendar year 2023, more than \$87 million has been invested in Maryland's oyster sanctuaries by state and federal partners.¹ These investments have resulted in more than 1,000 acres of restored reef in Maryland. By all metrics, nearly every reef that has received investment is considered a success.² The outcomes of targeted oyster restoration efforts in Maryland and Virginia's oyster sanctuaries are widely regarded as one of the most successful outcomes to date of the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.

Maryland's state-federal partnership for oyster restoration originated with President Obama's Executive Order 13508 – Chesapeake Bay Protection and Restoration. E.O. 13508 directed all relevant federal agencies, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to work with Bay states to restore oysters in twenty tributaries by 2025. This partnership was reinforced in the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement where the goal was updated and state and federal partners committed to restoring ten tributaries by 2025. As a result of this coordinated effort and investment, Maryland is on track to meet its current oyster restoration goal by the end of the year.

Throughout 2025, Chesapeake Bay Program partners will continue to review and update metrics and outcomes for the next iteration of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, including oyster restoration goals. Passage of Senate Bill 837 would send the message to partners that Maryland is not backing down on oyster recovery. This bill also comes at a time when Maryland is faced with a significant budget deficit and an uncertain federal outlook. To decline federal funding that has been so impactful would be ill-advised and poorly timed.

For these reasons, we urge the Committee's **unfavorable** report on Senate Bill 837.

¹ Maryland and Virginia Oyster Restoration Interagency Workgroups of the Chesapeake Bay Program's Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team. 2023 Chesapeake Bay Oyster Restoration Update: Progress toward the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement's 'Ten Tributaries by 2025' Oyster Outcome. 2024.

² Maryland Oyster Restoration Interagency Workgroup under the Chesapeake Bay Program's Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team. 2022 and 2023 Oyster Reef Monitoring Report: Analysis of Data from the 'Ten Tributaries' Sanctuary Oyster Restoration Initiative in Maryland. 2024.

Sincerely,

1. Advocates for Herring Bay
2. Annapolis Aquaculture
3. Annapolis Oyster Co.
4. Arundel Rivers Federation
5. Audubon Mid-Atlantic
6. Baltimore Greenspace
7. Beaverdam Creek Watershed Watch Group
8. Blue Water Baltimore
9. Building Conservation Trust
10. Cape Conservation Corps
11. Catoctin Land Trust
12. Chesapeake Bay Foundation
13. Chesapeake Beach Green Team
14. Chesapeake Beach Oyster Cultivation Society
15. Chesapeake Oyster Alliance
16. Coastal Conservation Association Maryland
17. Double T Oyster Ranch
18. Fallen Pine Oyster Co.
19. Friends of the Nanticoke River
20. Friends of St. Clements Bay
21. Hollywood Oyster Co.
22. Living Classrooms Foundation
23. Mark Street Ventures
24. Maryland Sea Grant Extension
25. National Aquarium
26. National Parks Conservation Association
27. National Wildlife Federation
28. Orchard Point Oyster Co.
29. Oyster Ninja/S.S. Shucking
30. Phillips Wharf Environmental Center
31. Severn River Association
32. Solar Oysters
33. St. Mary's River Watershed Association
34. The 6th Branch
35. True Chesapeake Oyster Co.
36. Vernal Pool Partners
37. Waterfront Partnership of Baltimore
38. Waterkeepers Chesapeake
39. Wicomico Environmental Trust