



Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 363
Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation - Oyster
Shucking House Loan Program

Feb 28, 2025

Chairperson Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 363. ShoreRivers is an organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the Eastern Shore's waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education. ShoreRivers has long been engaged in oyster restoration efforts in collaboration with partners such as the Oyster Recovery Partnership, the Oyster Advisory Commission, the Eastern Bay Oyster Workgroup, and the Marylanders Grow Oysters program.

Senate Bill 363 represents a crucial step in strengthening Maryland's seafood economy while ensuring the retention of oyster shells within the state to support aquaculture, public fishery repletion programs, oyster hatcheries, and large-scale restoration projects. Oyster shells are an irreplaceable resource for the Chesapeake Bay's ecological health and economic sustainability. These shells provide the necessary substrate for new oysters to attach and grow, supporting both natural populations and aquaculture efforts. **Without a reliable supply of shell, Maryland's ambitious oyster restoration goals—key to improving water quality, enhancing fish habitat, and fostering coastal resilience—are at risk.**

By providing targeted financial assistance to seafood dealers and tidal fish license holders, SB 363 will facilitate much-needed infrastructure investments in oyster processing facilities and equipment.

Importantly, the bill's loan forgiveness mechanism incentivizes the return of oyster shells to the Department of Natural Resources or their use in spat-on-shell planting. These provisions help close the shell loop in Maryland's oyster economy, keeping this critical resource within the state rather than losing it to out-of-state markets. **Retaining oyster shells locally strengthens the public fishery and bolsters restoration programs that are essential to restoring the Chesapeake Bay's oyster population.**

The economic benefits of SB 363 also cannot be overstated. The bill encourages job creation and retention within the seafood industry, providing loans of up to \$250,000 to expand operations and modernize processing facilities. This investment will help seafood businesses remain competitive while contributing to the sustainability of Maryland's working waterfronts and coastal communities.

Sincerely,

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

ShoreRivers

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