



**Testimony in Opposition of SB 76
Natural Resources – Fisheries – Oyster Management**

January 31, 2025

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **OPPOSITION** to **SB 76**, which pertains to oyster management in Maryland. This bill, if passed, would have detrimental effects on the health and sustainability of our state's oyster population and the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem as a whole.

This bill would weaken penalties for oyster poaching and allow reinstatement of a revoked license after five years, as well as **weaken the penalties for oystering with restricted gear types up to 200 feet inside designated areas.**

In its 2009 report, the Maryland Oyster Advisory Commission stated, “there is no single factor more important to the future of ecologic restoration and aquaculture than to address and dramatically reduce the ongoing illegal oyster harvesting activities.” Oyster poaching is a significant impediment to oyster recovery. Over the past 5 years, there have been over 80 citations issued for oystering in sanctuaries, representing a small fraction of poachers who were caught for just one category of poaching violations.

There are five categories of oyster poaching violations that can trigger revocation of an oyster authorization. These include harvesting oysters inside a sanctuary, removing oysters from an aquaculture lease, harvesting oysters in areas closed for water quality, harvesting out of permitted times, and harvesting with a gear type that is not permitted. These are egregious violations that threaten the industry's viability, the recovery of the oyster population, and the safety of Maryland citizens. The statutory requirement that an individual's authorization to catch oysters be revoked if they are found guilty of one of these five violations reflects the seriousness of these actions. **Revocation is intended to be a strong deterrent to those considering skirting these regulations for monetary gain.**

Weakening oyster poaching is **detrimental to the honest efforts of watermen who comply with harvest regulations.**

We urge the Committee to provide an **unfavorable** report on Senate Bill 76 and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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

ShoreRivers

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