



Testimony in Opposition to SB0837
House Energy and Transportation Committee
March 4, 2025

The Wicomico Environmental Trust and The Friends of the Nanticoke River **oppose** HB 1022 for numerous reasons:

1. Thriving oyster populations are critical components of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. They provide valuable ecological services including water filtration, sediment stabilization, nutrient reduction, carbon cycling, and shoreline protection, and provide habitat for juvenile fish, crabs, and other organisms.
2. Oyster populations have been severely depleted by over a century of overfishing, disease, and mismanagement, and are now at about 1% of historic levels.
3. Restoration of oyster habitats will provide improved ecological services as stated above. In addition, spawning of oysters on restored beds will improve spat settlement on adjacent oyster beds that are open to commercial fishing.
4. Oyster restoration efforts in the Chesapeake Bay are the largest such programs in the world, covering hundreds of acres. The results to date have been highly successful. Post-restoration monitoring has shown that 85% to 97% of the restored reefs met at least the minimum criteria for oyster density and biomass that were established in 2011. The scale of oyster restoration exceeds the State's ability to support it, so federal funds are necessary for this critically important work.
5. Federal funds support the State's three main goals for oyster restoration, which include:
 - a. Improving the public fishery (via hatchery-produced spat on shell).
 - b. Conserving oyster brood stock in sanctuaries as a source for adjacent grounds and future production.
 - c. Supporting growth of the oyster aquaculture industry, which is the fastest growing segment of Maryland seafood production.
6. In addition to direct restoration, federal funding indirectly supports world-class research on the effects of restoration, such as understanding ecosystem services and nitrification cycles associated with restored oyster beds.

7. The hatchery at Horn Point currently supplies over 50% of spat-on-shell production for all sectors of the industry – restoration, aquaculture, and the public fishery. They put more spat-on-shell into public fishing areas than sanctuary areas and cannot meet the demand for spat production.
8. Negative impacts of this bill are widespread:
 - a. The Horn Point oyster hatchery is largely supported by federal funding; loss of this funding would terminate its ability to produce spat, as well as support multiple research projects associated with restoration work.
 - b. It would block use of \$10M in NOAA funding already received for planned future restoration efforts in Herring Bay, the Nanticoke River, and Hooper Strait.
 - c. The oyster industry includes harvest, aquaculture, and restoration. Jobs, income, and tax revenue in all of these sectors would be impacted.
 - d. The term “oyster restoration” is not defined in the bill and could be misinterpreted as applying to shoreline protection programs such as at Poplar Island.
9. Oyster restoration as currently practiced in Maryland is the result of many years of research, development, and planning, and amounts to the “Best Practice” that can be implemented for the industry and the resource. Improvements can be achieved by including input from all sectors of the industry. Placing limits on how oyster restoration is accomplished would impede progress and obstruct future options.

For all of the reasons listed above, the proposed legislation is short-sighted and not in the best interest of the public or the oyster industry. We respectfully urge the Committee to report **unfavorably** on this bill.