



SUPPORT for SB181

1/28/2026

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Honorable Members of the EEE Committee:

My name is Benjamin Ford, and I serve as the Miles-Wye Riverkeeper for ShoreRivers. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of Senate Bill 181, the Lead and Lead-Based Ammunition Phase-Out Act.

ShoreRivers works to protect and restore the rivers, creeks, and wetlands of Maryland's Eastern Shore. Our mission is rooted in science, public health, and stewardship. From submerged aquatic vegetation to oyster reefs to drinking water sources, we see every day how contaminants move through ecosystems and into people's lives. Lead is one of the most persistent and damaging of these contaminants.

Scientific evidence shows that lead ammunition fragments widely upon impact and remains in harvested game and in the environment. A federal public health assessment found that "the quantified presence of lead bullet fragments in venison intended for human consumption indicates that a completed exposure pathway exists" and that "even at the lowest exposure scenario, there is predicted risk of elevated lead levels in blood among children consuming venison". This is not a theoretical concern. It is a documented pathway for exposure affecting families, food pantries, and rural communities.

The same report recommends transitioning to non-lead ammunition as "the simplest and most effective solution" to prevent poisoning in both humans and wildlife. Importantly, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has made clear that "there is no safe level of lead for humans, especially for children". Any avoidable introduction of lead into our environment carries long-term neurological, developmental, and economic costs.

Peer-reviewed research reinforces these conclusions. A comprehensive review published in Environmental Health documents how spent lead ammunition contaminates soil and water, poisons scavenging birds and mammals, and exposes people through meat consumption and environmental pathways. Raptors, waterfowl, and other wildlife on the Eastern Shore are particularly vulnerable, and their decline signals broader ecosystem harm.

SB 181 represents a practical, phased, and responsible response. Non-lead alternatives are widely available, effective, and already in use across much of the country. This bill does not undermine hunting traditions. Instead, it supports ethical, science-based stewardship that protects hunters, their families, and the landscapes they care about.

ShoreRivers

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper

Ben Ford, Miles Wye Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper

Maryland has long been a leader in Chesapeake Bay restoration. Allowing avoidable lead contamination to persist undermines that investment. By passing SB 181, the General Assembly can reduce preventable health risks, protect wildlife, and safeguard our rivers for future generations.

On behalf of ShoreRivers and the communities we serve, I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 181. Thank you for your 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