

Wednesday April 1, 2026

TO: Marc Korman Chair House Environment and Transportation Committee, and Committee Members

FROM: Michelle Dietz, Director of Government Relations, The Nature Conservancy; Amy Jacobs, Chesapeake Bay Program Director, The Nature Conservancy

POSITION: Support with Amendments SB558 Chesapeake Bay - Enhancement Program and Maryland Seafood Industry Financial Assistance Fund - Established

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports with amendments SB558 offered by Senator Bailey. For the past two decades, the world has looked to the Chesapeake Bay to learn what's possible in oyster restoration. No effort in the world matches the scale of what has been accomplished here, and TNC has been proud to support and invest in oyster restoration along with many others during this time. SB 558 seeks to codify an existing Memorandum of Understanding between the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Port of Baltimore, which would provide \$2 million in annual funding for oyster replenishment activities in the public oyster fishery.

TNC supports the oyster industry across the state. We have a history of working across sectors to leverage private, state and federal funding for its benefit. Harvesting and restoration efforts must be balanced in order to realize the many benefits oysters provide to the Chesapeake Bay, including improving the Bay's health, strengthening our state and local economies, and enhancing Maryland's culture.

TNC supports the expansion of bill language and funding to provide assistance to Maryland's Seafood industry. However, **we urge the Committee to adopt amendments which provide flexibility for DNR to determine the highest need for this funding on an annual basis defined by an annual work plan that is shared with relevant stakeholder advisory committees.** This would align the bill with how this program functioned previously and provide a means for DNR to invest in oyster sanctuaries that are impacted by transportation and dredging projects. These amendments have also been submitted by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. These amendments seek to broaden the scope of SB 558 to allow DNR to utilize Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program funding to advance oyster replenishment activities where they are most needed.

Suggested Amendments:

ON PAGE 1, LINE 21, AFTER "PROPAGATION," INSERT "RESEARCH, DEMONSTRATION, RESTORATION"

ON PAGE 2, LINE 10, STRIKE “(D)” AND INSERT, “(D) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL DRAFT AN ANNUAL WORK PLAN FOR THE PROGRAM DETAILING THE EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS. THE WORK PLAN WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE ON THE DEPARTMENT’S WEBSITE IN ADDITION TO BEING SHARED WITH RELEVANT ADVISORY BODIES TO THE DEPARTMENT.”

The Nature Conservancy commends Senator Bailey on introducing SB558, which will codify funding for oyster restoration and encourages the consideration of amendment language that would allow for a more expansive use of funding by DNR for restoration efforts. **Therefore, we urge a favorable with amendments report on SB 558.**