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## Testimony in **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS – Senate Bill 558: Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Established**

Environment and Transportation Committee  
April 1, 2026

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT OF SB558 WITH AMENDMENTS**, on behalf of Arundel Rivers Federation. Deeply rooted in the South, West, and Rhode Rivers, Arundel Rivers Federation heals and protects our waterways and champions clean water across Maryland. Our vision is healthy waterways for all, and we achieve our mission through restoration, education and outreach, and Riverkeeper programs.

Senate Bill 558 mandates a \$2.25M annual budget in appropriations from the Transportation Trust Fund to the Department of Natural Resources for “oyster propagation and replenishment.” The Department has stated that their interpretation of this language would restrict their uses to fishery plantings only and no funding could be used for oyster sanctuary restoration. **Arundel Rivers respectfully requests and amendment to add restoration as an authorized use of these funds**, providing DNR the flexibility they need to determine how best to use the funds and to invest in “underperforming” sanctuaries.

Oysters are critical natural resources that filter our waterways, support our local watermen and economy, and provide habitat for other aquatic life. Arundel Rivers strongly supports any efforts or programs that intend to boost native oyster populations in the Chesapeake, as populations remain at critically low levels compared to historic populations. Arundel Rivers has been supporting community-based oyster restoration through the Marylanders Grow Oyster Program for over a decade on the South River.

As a current Commissioner on the Oyster Advisory Commission, I am currently working with my fellow Commissioners and the Department of Natural Resources to identify how we can address underinvested oyster sanctuaries throughout the state. This bill could address that gap if it were amended to also include supporting oyster restoration. Arundel Rivers is supportive of restoring the original intent of this partnership between the Port of Baltimore and the Department first established in the 1990s, which gave DNR the discretion to utilize funds for restoration, research, surveys, *and* replenishment for the public fishery.

Arundel Rivers Federation wholeheartedly supports investing in our native oyster populations, which will result in better water quality, a stronger economy, and enhanced habitat, and we respectfully request a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS REPORT on SB558**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elle Bassett".

Elle Bassett  
South, West, and Rhode Riverkeeper  
Arundel Rivers Federation