



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

House Bill 784

Aquaculture – Placement of Shellfish, Bags, Nets, and Structures on Submerged Aquatic Vegetation - Extension

Date: February 25, 2026

To: House Environment & Transportation Committee

Position: **FAVORABLE**

From: Allison Colden,
MD Executive Director

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS House Bill 784** which extends the Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) authority to, at their discretion, allow the placement of aquaculture gear in areas where submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) has encroached on an aquaculture lease. The bill extends the current sunset provision for three years to June 30, 2030.

Gains in SAV have been among the few positive signs of Chesapeake Bay recovery tied to Maryland's efforts to reduce nutrient and sediment pollution under the Bay Blueprint. SAV beds respond to long-term improvements in water clarity and are therefore an excellent indicator of the bay's health. Though recent years have shown mixed SAV results, long-term trends continue to show resilience following weather-driven losses.

Maryland's oyster aquaculture industry has also been growing in recent years, from less than 4,000 bushels harvested in 2012 to more than 80,000 bushels harvested in 2024 (Figure 1). In many places, oyster aquaculture leases co-occur in areas that are conducive to SAV growth and as water quality conditions have improved, the number of leases where SAV is encroaching is increasing.

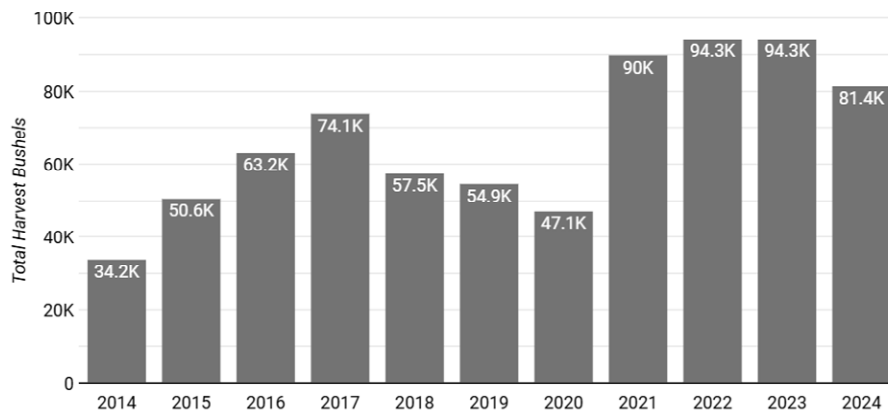


Figure 1: Total number of aquaculture oysters harvested in bushels annually. Source: UMD Extension

Existing statute allows DNR to permit placement of aquaculture gear in areas of active leases where SAV has encroached after lease issuance. It includes important safeguards that limit the potential impact to SAV, like prohibiting harvest by dredging and limiting placement of gear to not more than 10% of SAV area. While the ideal solution would be to develop a scientifically backed suite of best practices, research to do so is still

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 200,000 members and e-subscribers, including 71,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.

lacking. Therefore, HB 784 is a practical solution that provides oyster farmers some flexibility while remaining protective of SAV until more specific management approaches can be developed.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 784.

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at mstegman@cbf.org.