



Testimony Favorable with Amendments to House Bill 1599

3/12/2026

Chair Korman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** to HB1599 on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a Riverkeeper organization, focused on water quality on Maryland's Eastern Shore, with more than 2,000 members. Our mission is to protect Maryland's Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, education, and engagement.

HB1599 would codify the existing agreement that directs funding associated with Port-related impacts toward oyster replenishment in Maryland's public fishery. We support the principle that revenues tied to impacts on the Bay should be reinvested directly into the oyster resource. Dedicated funding has historically supported not only replenishment but broader restoration, research, and ecosystem benefits.

Over time, however, the scope of how these funds may be used has narrowed. Limiting expenditures exclusively to public fishery replenishment reduces flexibility and risks overlooking pressing ecological needs, including underinvestment in certain state oyster sanctuaries. Several sanctuaries, particularly in the Upper Bay and tributaries influenced by Port activities, have experienced degraded substrate, sedimentation, and declining reef structure. Without the ability to invest in bottom preparation, shell planting, and seed deployment in sanctuaries, Maryland may miss opportunities to strengthen overall oyster biomass and larval production that ultimately benefit both sanctuaries and adjacent harvest areas.

Oyster management works best as an integrated portfolio: public fishery areas, aquaculture, and protected sanctuaries functioning together. A funding stream tied to oyster mitigation should support the full oyster resource, not only one segment of it. Allowing the Department of Natural Resources discretion to allocate funds toward restoration within designated sanctuaries, especially those near the Port of Baltimore, would restore balance and align spending with science-based priorities.

In addition, transparency and public accountability are essential. Historically, annual work plans detailing expenditures were shared with advisory bodies and available for public review. Codifying a requirement for an annual work plan, publicly posted and shared with relevant advisory committees, would ensure that these funds are deployed through an open and inclusive process.

Accordingly, we respectfully request the following amendments:

ON PAGE 1, LINE 21, AFTER "PROPAGATION" INSERT "AND FOR OYSTER RESTORATION ACTIVITIES WITHIN DESIGNATED OYSTER SANCTUARIES."

ShoreRivers

Scott Budden, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper
Ben Ford, Miles Wye Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper

shorerivers.org | 443.385.0511 | info@shorerivers.org

AND 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 WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT."

For these reasons, ShoreRivers urges a favorable report on HB1599 with amendments to preserve flexibility, promote transparency, and ensure these funds benefit Maryland's entire oyster resource and the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Benjamin Ford



Benjamin Ford, Miles-Wye Riverkeeper, on behalf of ShoreRivers