

March 4, 2026

House Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
RE: House Bill 1388 – Oysters – Rotational Harvest – Pilot Program

Position: OPPOSE

Dear Chairman Korman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 1388. I am one of the thousands of oyster gardeners participating in community-based restoration of the Bay's oyster resource each year. It is well documented that oysters are *the* keystone species in Chesapeake Bay, on which the entire ecosystem depends. Extensive oyster reefs were the filter of the bay waters, allowing underwater grasses to grow and providing habitat for countless species. Currently only 1 to 2 percent of the original population remains.

House Bill 1388 would require DNR to open the Lower Chester, Lower Choptank, Herring Bay, and Lower Mainstem oyster sanctuaries to harvest, which includes areas that have received annual plantings by oyster gardeners. I feel strongly that our significant investments of time and effort deserve protection from harvest. These protected sanctuaries must be maintained to at least make a start to true oyster recovery.

It is beyond comprehension that we insist on trying to save the Maryland wild harvest at the expense of the recovery of oysters in the Chesapeake. An article that ran in the Baltimore Sun, Capital and other media appeared recently with the following discussion:
Eastern Shore lawmakers say a combination of factors — prolonged freezing weather, weak demand and growing competition from out-of-state oysters — devastated the winter harvest. State Sen. Johnny Mautz, R-Middle Shore, said the normal Thanksgiving-to-Christmas peak selling period largely vanished. That is prime time oyster sales. This year, it just did not exist," Mautz said. "There has not been a demand to buy Maryland oysters."

Why on earth would we think opening sanctuaries to oyster harvest is an answer?

We urge the Committee to protect the investments of the Maryland citizens contributing to oyster restoration annually, and we respectfully request an unfavorable report on House Bill 1388.

Sincerely,

William H. Whitman

