

HB1599-ET_MACo_SUP.pdf

Uploaded by: Dominic Butchko

Position: FAV



MARYLAND
Association of
COUNTIES

House Bill 1599

Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program – Established

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Environment & Transportation Committee

Date: March 13, 2026

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 1599. This bill would establish the Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program to support oyster propagation and replenishment projects in areas of the Chesapeake Bay affected by development associated with the Helen Delich Bentley Port of Baltimore. By directing resources to targeted restoration efforts, HB 1599 offers a practical strategy to help offset impacts and strengthen the long-term health of the Bay.

Oysters are a cornerstone of Maryland’s identity and a critical component of the Bay’s ecosystem and local economies. As natural filter feeders, oysters improve water clarity and quality—advancing restoration goals and supporting underwater grasses and the broader food web. Oyster reefs also function as “living infrastructure,” helping buffer shorelines from wave action, reducing erosion, and increasing resilience for coastal communities. Beyond these environmental benefits, oysters sustain working waterfronts through aquaculture, seafood markets, and heritage industries that remain central to many county economies.

HB 1599 helps move the needle toward ensuring the Chesapeake Bay remains a thriving environmental and economic asset for Maryland. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for HB 1599.

HB1599_Maryland LCV_FAV_Ches Bay Enhancement Progr

Uploaded by: Marisa Olszewski

Position: FAV



**MARYLAND
LEAGUE OF
CONSERVATION
VOTERS**

**Maryland LCV
Board of Directors**

Patrick Miller
Chair

Honorable Nancy Kopp
Treasurer

Bonnie Norman
Secretary

Kimberly Armstrong
Caroline Baker
Joe Gill
Lynn Heller
Honorable Steve Lafferty
Kevin Loeb

Kim Coble
Executive Director

March 13, 2026

**SUPPORT: HB 1599 Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program -
Establishment**

Chair Korman and Members of the Committee:

Maryland LCV Supports HB 1599 - Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program -
Establishment and we thank Delegate Jacobs for his leadership on this issue.

HB 1599 establishes in law a funding agreement that has existed for 30 years, supporting the restoration of Maryland's oyster population and acknowledging the need for mitigation in response to maintenance dredging and transportation projects to maintain operations at the Helen Delich Bentley Port of Baltimore.

Beginning with a first agreement signed in 1996 between Maryland Department of Transportation and Maryland Department of Natural Resources, the exchange of \$2 million annually from the Transportation Trust Fund has provided a vital and consistent funding source to support Maryland's oyster population. And Maryland's oyster population has been responding to this effort. Maryland DNR has been documenting [increases in oyster biomass since 2011](#). However, pressure from maintenance and use of Maryland's shipping channels is a constant source of sedimentation that can harm oyster bed health. For that reason, Maryland LCV believes continuing the agreement to fund the Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program at Maryland DNR through the Transportation Trust Fund is a good investment and offering appropriate mitigation efforts that support a healthy oyster population and the livelihood of Maryland watermen.

Maryland LCV urges a favorable report on HB 1599.

30 West Street, Suite C
Annapolis, MD 21401
Phone: 410-280-9855

www.mdlc.org

HB 1599 - CBF - FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Allison Colden

Position: FWA



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

House Bill 1559 Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Established

Date: March 13, 2026
To: Environment & Transportation Committee

Position: **Favorable with Amendment**
From: Dr. Allison Colden,
MD Executive Director

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS HOUSE BILL 1559 WITH AMENDMENTS**. As drafted, HB 1599 codifies an existing memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Port of Baltimore and the Department of Natural Resources which provides \$2 million in funding annually for oyster replenishment activities in the public oyster fishery.

The first iteration of this agreement was ratified in 1996 as mitigation for activities in and around the Port of Baltimore that could have impacts on oyster populations in the Upper Bay and tributaries. For many years, the funding was utilized for restoration, research, surveys, and replenishment activities which benefitted the public fishery, the Bay ecosystem, and the public. Each year, DNR prepared a work plan which was presented to the Sport Fisheries and Tidal Fisheries Advisory Committees for their review and feedback. These advisory committees represent a wide swath of stakeholders with an interest in Maryland's oyster resource.

Over the years, later versions of the MOU iteratively restricted the uses of the funds, with the most recent version requiring at least \$925,000 annually to be used exclusively for public fishery replenishment activities under the advisement of the County Oyster Committees. County Oyster Committees are comprised solely of watermen who reside and work in a specific county, limiting the perspectives and input to a narrow group. Around the same time, public presentations on the use of the funds and annual work plan also ceased, leaving the public in the dark about how funds were being spent.

DNR is currently reviewing its oyster management program to determine how to best address underinvestment in some state oyster sanctuaries, several of which are located in the Upper Bay near the Port. If the scope of this bill were broadened to allow DNR discretion on how best to spend the funds to support the state's oyster resources, similar to how the fund was used previously, this could be a potential boon to sanctuaries where the State has previously lacked resources to invest. It would also provide flexibility year-to-year to address priorities of importance to all oyster stakeholders. Otherwise, this bill codifies the narrow scope of the current MOU and misses a key opportunity to ensure public dollars are spent in a way that benefits the Bay and the state's oyster resource through a transparent process that accounts for multiple perspectives.

CBF urges the Committee's to report FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS on HB 1599.

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

Maryland Office • Philip Merrill Environmental Center • 6 Herndon Avenue • Annapolis • Maryland • 21403

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.

Suggested Amendments:

ON PAGE 1, LINE 21, STRIKE “PROPAGATION” AND 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 WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT.”

FWA for HB1599 - Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Progra

Uploaded by: Benjamin Ford

Position: FWA



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