



Susan O'Neill, Chair

Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

March 30, 2026

The Honorable Marc Korman
Environment and Transportation Committee
250 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Testimony in Support with Amendments of House Bill 1599 - Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Established

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

The Rural Maryland Council supports House Bill 1599 - Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Established and asks that HB 1599 be amended to mirror amendments approved to its Senate companion, SB 558, which authorizes the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) to issue emergency loans to watermen. HB 1599 creates a new statewide initiative within the Maryland Department of Natural Resources focused on rebuilding oyster populations and addressing environmental impacts linked to major development activities. The program is intended to direct resources toward areas of the Chesapeake Bay where oyster habitat has been disrupted, using restoration strategies such as reef rebuilding and the placement of young oysters to strengthen long-term population health.

Under this approach, restoration efforts would be guided by scientific data and coordinated planning, with funding dedicated to improving habitat conditions and supporting oyster survival. By establishing a formal structure in law, the State can ensure these efforts continue consistently over time rather than relying on temporary or informal arrangements. This creates a clearer connection between environmental impacts and the investments needed to address them.

Maryland's oyster industry has faced increasing pressure in recent years due to environmental variability, market shifts, and extreme weather, all of which have reduced harvest opportunities and created uncertainty for watermen. These conditions underscore the need for proactive measures to strengthen resilience and promote stability within the industry.

Despite these challenges, the seafood sector remains a significant contributor to Maryland's economy. According to the 2025 Report on the Impact of Resource-Based Industries on the Maryland Economy, prepared by the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation and the Business, Economic, and Community Outreach Network at Salisbury University, the industry generates approximately \$317.4 million in economic activity, representing 1.1% of total resource-based industry output. It supports 3,014 jobs (2.8% of employment in these sectors) and produces over \$11.9 million in state and local tax revenue. These figures do not fully reflect the continued growth of aquaculture. The industry also remains central to many coastal communities, with oysters playing a critical role in both ecosystem function and the viability of working waterfronts.



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By investing in oyster restoration tied to environmental impacts, HB 1599 advances a practical approach that supports both ecological health and economic sustainability. Strengthening oyster populations improves water quality, enhances habitat, and helps maintain a stable foundation for Maryland's seafood industry.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support with amendments of HB 1599.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "CD", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Charlotte Davis
RMC Executive Director