

SB0558-ET_MACo_SUP.pdf

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MARYLAND
Association of
COUNTIES

Senate Bill 558

Chesapeake Bay - Enhancement Program and Maryland Seafood Industry Financial Assistance Fund - Established

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Environment and Transportation
Committee

Date: April 1, 2026

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 558. 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, SB 558 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.

SB 558 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 SB 558.

HB1599 SB558 Chesapeake Bay Enhancement MDOT Fundi

Uploaded by: Jeannie Riccio

Position: FAV



Talbot Watermen Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 324 • Bozman, MD 21612 • (410) 745-9759 • info@talbotwatermen.org

February 20, 2026

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Guzzone and Members of the Committee,

We are writing to express our strong **support** for **Senate Bill 558/House Bill 1599 – Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program**.

For more than thirty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

Specifically, the funding supports the production and planting of hatchery seed and spat-on-shell in sanctuaries and on aquaculture oyster leases. It also supports the management and monitoring of these plantings along with citizen engagement efforts such as the Marylanders Grow Oysters Program. The other portion of the funding is allocated to the tidal counties of Maryland to implement in-water oyster replenishment projects which are recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a best management practice. DNR consults with conservation organizations, County Oyster Committees, and aquaculturists to develop an annual work plan helping to ensure that all projects are ecologically and economically sustainable.

For years, MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the environmental importance of our native oyster populations. Unfortunately, last year and again this year, MPA abruptly ended the ORA with no notice, which meant that all mitigation activities planned for this year would have



Talbot Watermen Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 324 • Bozman, MD 21612 • (410) 745-9759 • info@talbotwatermen.org

been halted. DNR provided gap funding from their budget last year so that planned projects could continue, but their gap funding is only providing partial and temporary relief. Additionally, while we greatly appreciate DNR's efforts, we feel strongly that it is not their responsibility to mitigate the impact of the Port's channel dredging activities in the Chesapeake Bay.

It is not every day that conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of this situation. With the recent increase in natural spat set, every dollar is critical for the placement of substrate, seed, and spat-on-shell. Every day that we lose also pushes Maryland further and further from reaching our Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals. The attached document provides an example of the success and positive impact that this program has had on our local waterways.

We are therefore respectfully requesting that the committee issue a favorable report on this bill to help ensure that MPA keeps their commitment and to help ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities as evidenced by the attached letters. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Herman Jeffrey Harrison
President

Contact: Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio
R&R Solutions, LLC
(443) 786-2137
jeannie@randrsolutions.us

Talbot Watermen Association, Inc. is a component fund of the
Mid-Shore Community Foundation, a 501(c)(3) public charity.



INNOVATIVE & SUSTAINABLE COMMERCIAL FISHING RESTORATION AND REPLENISHMENT BY THE NUMBERS



Annual replenishment of harvested areas is an important practice to ensure long-term resource health. The Talbot County Oystershell Committee leads our local replenishment efforts. Working in partnership with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Oyster Recovery Partnership, the committee begins planning each February and conducts plantings from April through September. **Funding from the oyster bushel tax and an MOU between DNR and MDOT are crucial to this program's success.**

98M Spat-on-Shell
Planted on 24.8 Acres

46,338 Pounds of Nitrogen Removed in 10 Years
At a Cost of Only \$739,000

33,880 Bushels of Shell
Planted on 17.7 Acres

2,109 Bushels of Seed Oysters
Planted on 6.7 Acres



February 10, 2026

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

I am writing to respectfully request your support for the continued funding and advancement of oyster restoration initiatives in Maryland, specifically those guided by the longstanding partnership between the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

For nearly thirty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA).

Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

Specifically, the funding supports the production and planting of hatchery seed and spat-on-shell in sanctuaries and on aquaculture oyster leases. DNR consults with conservation organizations, County Oyster Committees, and aquaculturists to develop an annual work plan, helping to ensure that all projects are ecologically and economically sustainable.

For years, MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the ongoing stewardship of our state's vital oyster populations. The success of these collaborative efforts not only benefits our natural resources but also supports local economies and communities that depend on healthy fisheries.

As we look to the future, your support is essential for safeguarding Maryland's environmental and economic well-being. I urge you to champion these critical programs and help secure the resources necessary for their continued success.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information or wish to discuss this matter in greater detail.

Sincerely,

Dan Worrell

Representing Fallen Pine Oyster Company

- **Positions held in Maryland Oyster Aquaculture**
 - Chairman Aquaculture Coordinating Council of Maryland
 - Vice Chairman of the Maryland Seafood Marketing Commission

COUNTY COUNCIL OF DORCHESTER COUNTY
COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING
501 Court Lane, P.O. Box 26
Cambridge, Maryland 21613
(410) 228-1700

GEORGE L. PFEFFER, JR., PRESIDENT
MIKE DETMER, VICE PRESIDENT
ROB KRAMER, JR.
WILLIAM V. NICHOLS
RICKY C. TRAVERS



JERRY JONES
COUNTY MANAGER
MACLEOD LAW GROUP LLC
COUNTY ATTORNEY

February 17, 2026

The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Senator
Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Letter of Support – Senate Bill 558 - Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Established

Dear Chairman Guzzone and Committee Members:

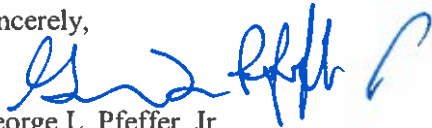
On behalf of the Dorchester County Council, I respectfully offer its support for Senate Bill 558 entitled, "Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Established," for the purpose of establishing the Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program to provide funding for certain oyster propagation and replenishment projects that mitigate the effects on the State's oyster population of certain transportation projects; and generally relating to the Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program.

Dorchester County strongly supports SB 558 because it creates a dedicated and predictable funding source to offset environmental impacts associated with major transportation and port infrastructure projects. As a Chesapeake Bay community with a long-standing economic and cultural connection to the seafood industry, the County understands the importance of sustaining healthy oyster populations that contribute to water quality, habitat restoration, and the vitality of Maryland's commercial fisheries.

By reinvesting in oyster propagation and replenishment efforts, this legislation helps ensure that economic growth and infrastructure improvements are balanced with responsible environmental stewardship and long-term resource sustainability. The proposed annual appropriation also provides accountability and stability for ongoing restoration efforts that benefit the entire Bay region. Therefore, we respectfully ask that you look favorably upon this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this letter of support. If you have any questions, please contact the Council's Office at (410) 228-1700

Sincerely,


George L. Pfeffer, Jr.
President

cc: The Honorable Johnny Mautz, Senator
The Honorable Christopher T. Adams, Delegate
The Honorable Sheree Sample-Hughes, Delegate
The Honorable Tom Hutchinson, Delegate



August 21, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

Since 1996, the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) have worked under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to provide vital funding to both Maryland's aquaculture industry and the commercial wild harvest industry for the purchase of seed, shell, and spat-on-shell. This partnership has been a cornerstone in strengthening Maryland's coastal economies, enhancing oyster restoration, and supporting workforce development.

This year, without notice, MDOT chose to discontinue its participation in the program. While we are grateful that DNR remains strongly supportive and has provided temporary resources to sustain projects, MDOT's withdrawal creates significant uncertainty for aquaculture operators, coastal communities, and conservation partners who rely on these funds. We respectfully emphasize that it should not fall solely on DNR to mitigate the broader impacts of state-level decisions that directly affect the Chesapeake Bay and the aquaculture workforce.

The funding at issue supports the production and planting of hatchery seed and spat-on-shell, the management and monitoring of restoration projects, and critical opportunities for new entrants into aquaculture—including women and minorities. Every investment in this program pays

dividends by advancing sustainable seafood production, creating jobs, and helping Maryland achieve its Chesapeake Bay restoration goals.

Minorities In Aquaculture (MIA) strongly supports restoring this funding in the upcoming budget. The program clearly strengthens Maryland's aquaculture workforce and contributes to the long-term resilience of our environment and economy. We respectfully urge your leadership in ensuring that MDOT recommits to this effort alongside DNR so these essential programs can continue without interruption.

Thank you for your continued attention to this issue and your commitment to Maryland's working waterfronts, natural resources, and future generations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Imani Black". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Imani" being more prominent than the last name "Black".

Imani Black
Founder & CEO
Minorities In Aquaculture

President: B. Baltus
410-952-6249
Vice President: R.
Spangler
410-477-3291
Second Vice-President:
M. Blake



Treasurer: E. Miller
410-686-0545

Secretary: A. Ashwell
7840 Denton Ave.
Baltimore Md. 21219
410-477-0798

August 15, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Md. 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Md. 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

There has been a mutual agreement between the Maryland Department of Transportation and Maryland's Department of Natural Resources since 1996, for oyster propagation.

The watermen of the state and Baltimore County would like to see this relationship continue for the health of the bay and economy.

Very Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Blair Baltus".

Blair Baltus
President
Baltimore County Watermen's Association
410-952-6249



Chesapeake Bay Seafood Industries Association

311-A Third Street * Annapolis, MD 21403 * Phone: 410-507-3249 * CBSIA@comcast.net

August 11, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

For nearly thirty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

Specifically, the funding supports the production and planting of hatchery seed and spat-on-shell in sanctuaries and on aquaculture oyster leases. It also supports the management and monitoring of these plantings along with citizen engagement efforts such as the Marylanders Grow Oysters Program. The other portion of the funding is allocated to the tidal counties of Maryland to implement in-water oyster replenishment projects which are recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a best management practice. DNR consults with conservation organizations, County Oyster Committees, and aquaculturists to develop an annual-work plan, helping to ensure that all projects are ecologically and economically sustainable.

For years, MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the environmental importance of our native oyster populations. Unfortunately, this year MPA abruptly ended the ORA with no notice, which meant that all mitigation activities planned for this year would have been halted. DNR

President, Jack Brooks; Vice President, Robin Hall; Secretary Treasurer, Bill Brooks; Executive Vice President, Bill Stelling
Board Members: Clay Brooks, Jerry Harris, Jay Newcomb, Casey Todd, Roy Todd, Aubrey Vincent, and Joe Spurry

provided gap funding from their budget so that the planned projects could continue, but their gap funding is only providing partial and temporary relief. Additionally, while we greatly appreciate DNR's efforts, we feel strongly that it is not their responsibility to mitigate the impact of the Port's channel dredging activities in the Chesapeake Bay.

It is not every day that conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of this situation. With the recent increase in natural spat set, every dollar is critical for the placement of substrate, seed, and spat-on-shell. Every day that we lose also pushes Maryland further and further from reaching our Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals.

We are therefore urging MPA to keep their commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Jack Brooks
President
Chesapeake Bay Seafood Industries Association



5209 Walnut Landing Road
Vienna, Maryland 21069
443-521-1938

July 31, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
103 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
14 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone:

For the past twenty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations for the transportation of waterborne commerce Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, Maryland's aquaculture industry and improving water quality for additional bay species. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

Specifically, the funding supports the production and planting of hatchery seed and spat-on-shell in sanctuaries and on aquaculture oyster leases. It also supports the management and monitoring of these plantings along with citizen engagement efforts such as the Marylanders Grow Oysters Program. The other portion of the funding is allocated to the tidal counties of Maryland to implement in-water oyster replenishment projects which are recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a best management practice. DNR consults with

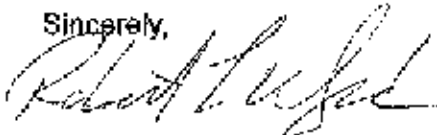
conservation organizations, County Oyster Committees, and aquaculturists to develop an annual work plan, helping to ensure that all projects are ecologically and economically sustainable.

For years, MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the environmental importance of our native oyster populations. Unfortunately, this year MPA abruptly ended the ORA with no notice, which meant that all mitigation activities planned for this year would have been halted. DNR provided gap funding from their budget so that the planned projects could continue, but their gap funding is only providing partial and temporary relief. Additionally, while we greatly appreciate DNR's efforts, we feel strongly that it is not their responsibility to mitigate the impact of the Port's channel dredging activities in the Chesapeake Bay.

It is not every day that conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of this situation. With the recent increase in natural spat set, every dollar is critical for the placement of substrate, seed, and spat-on-shell. Every day that we lose also pushes Maryland further and further from reaching our Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals.

We are therefore urging MPA to keep their commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Robert L. Whaples
President



August 11, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
II-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

For nearly thirty years, the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) have collaborated with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. Dredging in the Port of Baltimore is still being conducted and continues to impact on the oyster resource and watermen community whose livelihood is tied to the Bay. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

The funding supports the production and planting of hatchery seed, substrate and spat-on-shell in sanctuaries and aquaculture oyster leases. It also supports the management and monitoring of these plantings. The other portion of the funding is allocated to the tidal counties of Maryland to implement in-water oyster replenishment projects which are recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as an aquaculture best management practice. The replenishment projects plants over one-hundred thousand bushels of aged oyster shell and hundreds of millions spat on shell annually, by privately-operated Maryland shellfish businesses who have the equipment, vessels, and knowledge to cost effectively conduct these aquaculture activities. DNR consults with conservation organizations, County Oyster Committees, and

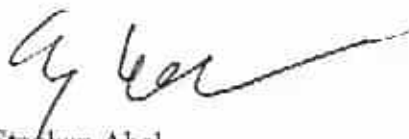
aquaculturists to develop an annual work plan, helping to ensure that all projects are ecologically and economically sustainable.

For years, MDOT / MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the environmental and economic importance of our native oyster populations. Unfortunately, this year MPA abruptly ended the ORA with no notice, which meant that all mitigation activities planned for this year would have been halted. DNR provided gap funding from their budget so that the planned projects could continue, but their gap funding is only providing partial and temporary relief. Additionally, while we greatly appreciate DNR's efforts, the community at large feels strongly that it is not their responsibility to mitigate the impact of the Port's channel dredging activities in the Chesapeake Bay.

It is not often that conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of this issue. Therefore, we are urging MDOT / MPA to keep their financial commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue on behalf of the businesses, like Ferry Cove, who have dedicated our time, efforts and resources to achieve these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Stephan Abel
President / CEO
Ferry Cove Shellfish



Green Pearl, LLC
Easton, Maryland

July 24, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

Green Pearl LLC is a seven-year-old aquaculture company on Maryland's Eastern Shore. We have three aquaculture leases with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) where we grow and harvest oysters. Being involved in this industry we continuously apply spat on shell to our lease areas. Oysters are not only a revenue source to those in the industry, but far more important perhaps the best and most natural method for cleaning the waters of the Chesapeake.

It is not every day that conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of the lack of funding for the Oyster Recovery Agreement. With the recent increase in natural spat set, every dollar is critical for the placement of substrate, seed, and spat-on-shell. Every day that we lose also pushes Maryland further and further from reaching our Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals.

Specifically, the funding supports the production and planting of hatchery seed and spat-on-shell in sanctuaries and on aquaculture oyster leases. It also supports the management and monitoring of these plantings along with citizen engagement efforts such as the Marylanders Grow Oysters Program. The other portion of the funding is allocated to the tidal counties of Maryland to implement in-water oyster replenishment projects which are recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a best management practice. DNR consults with conservation organizations, County Oyster Committees, and aquaculturists to develop an annual work plan, helping to ensure that all projects are ecologically and economically sustainable.

For years, MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the environmental importance of our native oyster populations. Unfortunately, this year MPA abruptly ended the ORA with no notice, which meant that all mitigation activities planned for this year would have been halted. DNR provided gap funding from their budget so that the planned projects could continue, but their gap funding is only providing partial and temporary relief. Additionally, while we greatly appreciate DNR's efforts, we feel strongly that it is not their responsibility to mitigate the impact of the Port's channel dredging activities in the Chesapeake Bay.

For the past twenty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

We are therefore urging MPA to keep their commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Green Pearl, LLC



By: William F. Cockayne, Authorized Member



MARYLAND
OYSTERMEN
ASSOCIATION

P.O. BOX 290
ROCK HALL, MD 21661
www.MDOYSTERMEN.org

MOA BOD Members

Jim Mullin
Executive Director

Bunky Chance
Jimmy Eline
Jimmy Kahl
Chuckie White
Wayne Wilson

"The Bay's A Big Place
And There's Room For
Everybody"

August 15, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson & Chair Guzzone,

Since 1996 there has been a mutual agreement between the Maryland Department of Transportation and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources for the Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program (Oyster Recovery). The goals and objectives of the agreement address mitigation for the environmental impacts from state dredging to enhance the transportation of waterborne commerce. The mitigation process has had a positive impact on the resource-based economies of the tidewater counties of the state.

The agreement and its overall goals and objectives of providing economic development, sustainable employment and recovery from impacts of state dredging for improved water quality are in danger of being extinguished and we respectfully request that the overall program be continued for the health of the state's economy and the health of the bay.

Thank you for your time & consideration,

James T. Mullin, Executive Director

Cc: Robert T. Brown, President
Maryland Waterman's Association



The Maryland Watermen's Association, Inc.

3 August 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone

The Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for the past 20 years under the Oyster Recovery Agreement to mitigate the channel dredging operations (which is degrading of water quality with silt and other unknown hazard waste).

The funds have improved the Oyster Industry by planting spat on shells, wild seed, and oyster shells. These oyster shells are of high value as sub straight, which rebuild the Natural Oyster bars. These funds are distributed to tidal Counties of Maryland. In conjunction with the DNR, the County Oyster Committee's and the Oyster Recovery Partnership (ORP) have developed best management plan that enhances a sustainable oyster industry.

Harvest fell to an all-time recorded low of 26,000 (25,843) bushels in 2003- 2004 season. This recorded decline was due to the 4-year drought that occurred from 1999 to 2002. The prolonged drought elevated salinity and accelerated oyster disease and mortality.

With funding from MPA and best management practices our oyster industry is not only sustainable but has increased the water quality and helped increase natural spat set. These funds need to be reinstated to continue this valuable industry's recovery, as harvest has been proven with the latest data from 2022-2023 of 722,850 bushels harvest and 2023-2024 of 437,536 due only decreasing due to demand. The Maryland Watermen's Association asks the legislators to assist in reinstalling these valuable funds for the environment, economy, and continued sustainability. Thank you for your time in this matter and we look forward to speaking with you.

Very Respectfully,

ROBERT T BROWN, SR.
PRESIDENT
MARYLAND WATERMEN'S ASSOCIATION, INC.



MILES RIVER YACHT CLUB

PH 410-745-9511

P. O. Box 158

www.milesriveryc.org

FX 410-745-2602

St. Michaels, MD 21663

Commodore Nick Simpson
Vice Commodore Dennis Kelly
Rear Commodore Matt Kealy

Fleet Captain Andrew Southworth
Secretary Jennifer Williams
Treasurer John Hines

July 29, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Oyster Recovery Agreement

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

The Miles River Yacht Club ("MRYC") was founded on the shores of the Miles River in 1921 and is now a thriving club with over 800 members. Our mission is to stimulate interest in boating, sailing, and swimming, to promote social recreation, and to enhance the general welfare of the community.

Our membership spends much of their time on the waters of the Chesapeake Bay, our children swim on the river and learn to sail on its waters. We strongly believe

that enhancing the general welfare of our community involves protecting and improving the quality of the waters of the Bay.

We strongly believe that by far the best and most natural method for cleaning the waters of the Chesapeake is to encourage and support oyster restoration. To that end many of our members, and the club itself, have participated in the Marylanders Grow Oysters Program.

It is not every day that recreational boaters, conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of the lack of funding for the Oyster Recovery Agreement. With the recent increase in natural spat set, every dollar is critical for the placement of substrate, seed, and spat-on-shell. Every day that we lose also pushes Maryland further and further from reaching our Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals.

Specifically, the funding supports the production and planting of hatchery seed and spat-on-shell in sanctuaries and on aquaculture oyster leases. It also supports the management and monitoring of these plantings along with citizen engagement efforts such as the Marylanders Grow Oysters Program. The other portion of the funding is allocated to the tidal counties of Maryland to implement in-water oyster replenishment projects which are recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a best management practice. DNR consults with conservation organizations, County Oyster Committees, and aquaculturists to develop an annual work plan, helping to ensure that all projects are ecologically and economically sustainable.

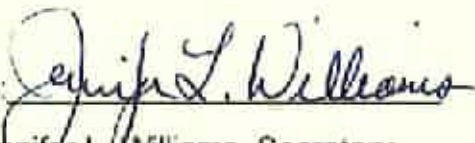
For years, MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the environmental importance of our native oyster populations. Unfortunately, this year MPA abruptly ended the ORA with no notice, which meant that all mitigation activities planned for this year would have been halted. DNR provided gap funding from their budget so that the planned projects could continue, but their gap funding is only providing partial and temporary relief. Additionally, while we greatly appreciate DNR's efforts, we feel strongly that it is not their responsibility to mitigate the impact of the Port's channel dredging activities in the Chesapeake Bay.

For the past twenty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

We are therefore urging MPA to keep their commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Miles River Yacht Club

By: 
Jennifer L. Williams, Secretary



July 22, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone:

The Oyster Recovery Partnership (ORP), based in Annapolis and founded in 1994, is a nonprofit organization that manages much of Maryland's in-water oyster restoration efforts. Under contract with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), ORP has planted more than 13 billion juvenile oysters on both sanctuary and public reefs throughout the Maryland portion of the Chesapeake Bay. We are proud to play a central role in the successful restoration of one of Maryland's most vital natural resources.

For more than 20 years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has been an essential partner in funding Maryland's oyster restoration strategy. This funding serves to mitigate the environmental impact of the Port's ongoing channel dredging activities on native oyster populations. Along with per-bushel harvest taxes paid by the commercial industry, MPA funding has supported the planting of more than 2.4 billion juvenile oysters ("spat-on-shell") and over 1.8 million bushels of shell on public, harvestable reefs.

Since 2014, ORP has partnered with DNR to administer these public fishery repletion funds. Each year, under DNR contract, we engage commercial watermen to plant spat-on-shell and recycled oyster shells on reefs identified by Maryland's 11 County Oyster Committees. This Port-funded repletion program has contributed directly to four consecutive years of the largest commercial oyster harvests in more than 30 years.

Historically, MPA has demonstrated a strong commitment to balancing the Bay's economic and environmental priorities. However, earlier this year, MPA unexpectedly withdrew its support



for public oyster repletion. While DNR stepped in to provide limited gap funding to continue this year's projects, that funding is both partial and temporary. We greatly appreciate DNR's efforts but believe strongly that it is not the agency's responsibility to mitigate the Port's environmental impacts from dredging in the Bay.

A recent DNR study shows that Maryland's oyster population has tripled over the past two decades. Combined with record harvests, this progress clearly demonstrates that Maryland's restoration strategy is working. In recognition of this success, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency now identifies oyster restoration as a Best Management Practice (BMP), enabling the state and local governments to earn valuable nutrient reduction credits toward their Watershed Implementation Plans.

ORP is proud to stand with DNR, Maryland's commercial watermen, County Oyster Committees, conservation partners, and the seafood industry in urging the MPA to reinstate critical funding for public oyster repletion. We respectfully request your support in ensuring the continuation of this vital program.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Slacum', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ward Slacum
Executive Director
Oyster Recovery Partnership
Office: 410.990.4970 (ext 1015)
wslacum@oysterrecovery.org



Phillips Wharf Environmental Center

July 25th, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
II-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Oyster Recovery Agreement

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

The Phillips Wharf Environmental Center (PWEC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that focuses on environmental education. Our mission is to encourage, educate, and engage people of all ages with Chesapeake Bay stewardship. Our vision is a healthy Chesapeake Bay with thriving fisheries, clean water, and access for all.

Founded in 2005 in a former crab shanty on Tilghman Island, PWEC relocated to Easton Point Park in Easton, Maryland in 2022. Since 2011, PWEC has continuously worked with support of the Marylanders Grow Oysters program and the Oyster Recovery Partnership to run a participatory oyster restoration program known as Tilghman Islanders Grow Oysters. Juvenile oysters, known as spat on shell, are provided to Phillips Wharf to distribute to volunteer growers in Tilghman and along Broad and Harris Creek. Volunteers sign up to host these juvenile oysters by hanging them from their docks in cages for approximately 9 months. During this time, the volunteer growers are expected to occasionally shake the cages to help keep the oysters clean of any dirt and other debris.

At the end of the program, the cages are collected, and the juvenile oysters are planted on wild oyster reefs. Specifically, our program plants oysters in the Harris Creek Sanctuary at the direction of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and we have done so since the beginning of the oyster restoration project in Harris Creek called for in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.

It is not every day that conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of this situation. With the recent increase in natural spat set, every dollar is critical for the placement of substrate, seed, and spat-on-shell. Every day that we lose also pushes Maryland further and further from reaching our Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals.

We are therefore urging MPA to keep their commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Dr. Kristen Lycett, Executive Director

Phillips Wharf Environmental Center



Queen Anne's County Watermen's Association
108 Spruce Drive
Queen Anne, MD 21657



August 19, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

For the past twenty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with [these replenishment](#) and restoration activities.

Specifically, the funding supports the production and planting of hatchery [seed](#) and [spat-on-shell](#) in sanctuaries and on aquaculture oyster leases. It also supports the management and monitoring of these plantings along with citizen engagement efforts such as the Marylanders Grow Oysters Program. The other portion of the funding is allocated to the tidal counties of Maryland to implement in-water oyster replenishment projects which are recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a best management practice. DNR consults with conservation organizations, County Oyster Committees, and aquaculturists to develop an annual work plan, helping to ensure that all projects are ecologically and economically sustainable.

For years, MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the environmental importance of our native oyster populations. Unfortunately, this year MPA abruptly ended the ORA with no notice, which meant that all mitigation activities planned for this year would [have been](#) halted. DNR provided gap funding from their budget so that the planned projects could continue, but their gap funding is only providing partial and temporary relief. Additionally, while we greatly appreciate DNR's efforts, we feel strongly that it is not their responsibility to mitigate the impact of the Port's channel dredging activities in [the Chesapeake Bay](#).

It is not every day that conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of this situation. With the recent increase in natural spat set, every dollar is critical for the placement of substrate, seed, and spat-on-shell. Every day that we lose also pushes Maryland further and further from reaching our Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals.

We are therefore urging MPA to keep their commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ian Horney,
President
Queen Anne's County Watermen's Association.



July 11, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

For nearly thirty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

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For years, MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the environmental importance of our native oyster populations. Unfortunately, this year MPA abruptly ended the ORA with no notice, which meant that all mitigation activities planned for this year would have been halted. DNR provided gap funding from their budget so that the planned projects could continue, but their gap funding is only providing partial and temporary relief. Additionally, while we greatly appreciate DNR's efforts, we feel strongly that it is not their responsibility to mitigate the impact of the Port's channel dredging activities in the Chesapeake Bay.

It is not every day that conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of this situation. With the recent increase in natural spat set, every dollar is critical for the placement of substrate, seed, and spat-on-shell. Every day that we lose also pushes Maryland further and further from reaching our Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals.

We are therefore urging MPA to keep their commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John A. Horgan *T. Lynn Federal Sealord*



10448 Azalea Rd Berlin Md 21811

August 15, 2025

Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 Sate Circle
Annapolis Md 21401

Dear Mr. Ferguson,

I am writing to express my support for the continuation of the Oyster Mitigation Program, a mutual agreement between MDDOT and MD DNR for the Chesapeake Bay enhancement program (Oyster Recovery). This program has been instrumental in mitigating environmental impacts from state dredging to enhance transportation while having a positive impact on the resource-based economies of counties in Maryland.

The Oyster Recovery Program has not only contributed to the overall health of the Chesapeake Bay but has also played a significant role in maintaining the economy of our state. By supporting the oyster population, we are not only protecting a vital natural resource but also contributing to the livelihoods of countless Marylanders who rely on the seafood industry.

As a resident of Maryland and a waterman, I am deeply concerned about the future of our state's environment and economy. I strongly believe that the continuation of the Oyster Recovery Program is essential for the overall health of the Chesapeake Bay and the well-being of our state.

I kindly request that you, as a legislator, assist in reinstalling these valuable funds for the environment, economy, and continued oyster sustainability. Your support for this program will not only benefit the Chesapeake Bay and the people who depend on it but also ensure the long-term health and prosperity of our great state.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. I look forward to your support in continuing the Oyster Recovery Program for the benefit of all Marylanders.

Sincerely,

Earl R Gwin, Jr
President
Waterman's Association of Worcester County, Md

HB1599 SB558 Chesapeake Bay Enhancement MDOT Fundi

Uploaded by: Jeff Harrison

Position: FAV



Talbot Watermen Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 324 • Bozman, MD 21612 • (410) 745-9759 • info@talbotwatermen.org

February 20, 2026

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Guzzone and Members of the Committee,

We are writing to express our strong **support** for **Senate Bill 558/House Bill 1599 – Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program**.

For more than thirty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

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For years, MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the environmental importance of our native oyster populations. Unfortunately, last year and again this year, MPA abruptly ended the ORA with no notice, which meant that all mitigation activities planned for this year would have



Talbot Watermen Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 324 • Bozman, MD 21612 • (410) 745-9759 • info@talbotwatermen.org

been halted. DNR provided gap funding from their budget last year so that planned projects could continue, but their gap funding is only providing partial and temporary relief. Additionally, while we greatly appreciate DNR's efforts, we feel strongly that it is not their responsibility to mitigate the impact of the Port's channel dredging activities in the Chesapeake Bay.

It is not every day that conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of this situation. With the recent increase in natural spat set, every dollar is critical for the placement of substrate, seed, and spat-on-shell. Every day that we lose also pushes Maryland further and further from reaching our Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals. The attached document provides an example of the success and positive impact that this program has had on our local waterways.

We are therefore respectfully requesting that the committee issue a favorable report on this bill to help ensure that MPA keeps their commitment and to help ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities as evidenced by the attached letters. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Herman Jeffrey Harrison
President

Contact: Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio
R&R Solutions, LLC
(443) 786-2137
jeannie@randrsolutions.us

Talbot Watermen Association, Inc. is a component fund of the
Mid-Shore Community Foundation, a 501(c)(3) public charity.



INNOVATIVE & SUSTAINABLE COMMERCIAL FISHING RESTORATION AND REPLENISHMENT BY THE NUMBERS



Annual replenishment of harvested areas is an important practice to ensure long-term resource health. The Talbot County Oystershell Committee leads our local replenishment efforts. Working in partnership with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Oyster Recovery Partnership, the committee begins planning each February and conducts plantings from April through September. **Funding from the oyster bushel tax and an MOU between DNR and MDOT are crucial to this program's success.**

98M Spat-on-Shell
Planted on 24.8 Acres

46,338 Pounds of Nitrogen Removed in 10 Years
At a Cost of Only \$739,000

33,880 Bushels of Shell
Planted on 17.7 Acres

2,109 Bushels of Seed Oysters
Planted on 6.7 Acres



February 10, 2026

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

I am writing to respectfully request your support for the continued funding and advancement of oyster restoration initiatives in Maryland, specifically those guided by the longstanding partnership between the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

For nearly thirty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA).

Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

Specifically, the funding supports the production and planting of hatchery seed and spat-on-shell in sanctuaries and on aquaculture oyster leases. DNR consults with conservation organizations, County Oyster Committees, and aquaculturists to develop an annual work plan, helping to ensure that all projects are ecologically and economically sustainable.

For years, MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the ongoing stewardship of our state's vital oyster populations. The success of these collaborative efforts not only benefits our natural resources but also supports local economies and communities that depend on healthy fisheries.

As we look to the future, your support is essential for safeguarding Maryland's environmental and economic well-being. I urge you to champion these critical programs and help secure the resources necessary for their continued success.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information or wish to discuss this matter in greater detail.

Sincerely,

Dan Worrell

Representing Fallen Pine Oyster Company

- **Positions held in Maryland Oyster Aquaculture**
 - Chairman Aquaculture Coordinating Council of Maryland
 - Vice Chairman of the Maryland Seafood Marketing Commission

COUNTY COUNCIL OF DORCHESTER COUNTY
COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING
501 Court Lane, P.O. Box 26
Cambridge, Maryland 21613
(410) 228-1700

GEORGE L. PFEFFER, JR., PRESIDENT
MIKE DETMER, VICE PRESIDENT
ROB KRAMER, JR.
WILLIAM V. NICHOLS
RICKY C. TRAVERS



JERRY JONES
COUNTY MANAGER
MACLEOD LAW GROUP LLC
COUNTY ATTORNEY

February 17, 2026

The Honorable Guy Guzzone, Senator
Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Letter of Support – Senate Bill 558 - Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Established

Dear Chairman Guzzone and Committee Members:

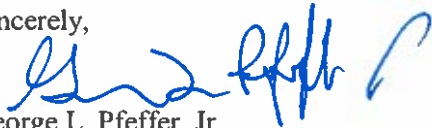
On behalf of the Dorchester County Council, I respectfully offer its support for Senate Bill 558 entitled, "Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Established," for the purpose of establishing the Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program to provide funding for certain oyster propagation and replenishment projects that mitigate the effects on the State's oyster population of certain transportation projects; and generally relating to the Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program.

Dorchester County strongly supports SB 558 because it creates a dedicated and predictable funding source to offset environmental impacts associated with major transportation and port infrastructure projects. As a Chesapeake Bay community with a long-standing economic and cultural connection to the seafood industry, the County understands the importance of sustaining healthy oyster populations that contribute to water quality, habitat restoration, and the vitality of Maryland's commercial fisheries.

By reinvesting in oyster propagation and replenishment efforts, this legislation helps ensure that economic growth and infrastructure improvements are balanced with responsible environmental stewardship and long-term resource sustainability. The proposed annual appropriation also provides accountability and stability for ongoing restoration efforts that benefit the entire Bay region. Therefore, we respectfully ask that you look favorably upon this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this letter of support. If you have any questions, please contact the Council's Office at (410) 228-1700

Sincerely,


George L. Pfeffer, Jr.
President

cc: The Honorable Johnny Mautz, Senator
The Honorable Christopher T. Adams, Delegate
The Honorable Sheree Sample-Hughes, Delegate
The Honorable Tom Hutchinson, Delegate



August 21, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

Since 1996, the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) have worked under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to provide vital funding to both Maryland's aquaculture industry and the commercial wild harvest industry for the purchase of seed, shell, and spat-on-shell. This partnership has been a cornerstone in strengthening Maryland's coastal economies, enhancing oyster restoration, and supporting workforce development.

This year, without notice, MDOT chose to discontinue its participation in the program. While we are grateful that DNR remains strongly supportive and has provided temporary resources to sustain projects, MDOT's withdrawal creates significant uncertainty for aquaculture operators, coastal communities, and conservation partners who rely on these funds. We respectfully emphasize that it should not fall solely on DNR to mitigate the broader impacts of state-level decisions that directly affect the Chesapeake Bay and the aquaculture workforce.

The funding at issue supports the production and planting of hatchery seed and spat-on-shell, the management and monitoring of restoration projects, and critical opportunities for new entrants into aquaculture—including women and minorities. Every investment in this program pays

dividends by advancing sustainable seafood production, creating jobs, and helping Maryland achieve its Chesapeake Bay restoration goals.

Minorities In Aquaculture (MIA) strongly supports restoring this funding in the upcoming budget. The program clearly strengthens Maryland's aquaculture workforce and contributes to the long-term resilience of our environment and economy. We respectfully urge your leadership in ensuring that MDOT recommits to this effort alongside DNR so these essential programs can continue without interruption.

Thank you for your continued attention to this issue and your commitment to Maryland's working waterfronts, natural resources, and future generations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Imani Black". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Imani" being more prominent than the last name "Black".

Imani Black
Founder & CEO
Minorities In Aquaculture

President: B. Baltus
410-952-6249
Vice President: R.
Spangler
410-477-3291
Second Vice-President:
M. Blake



Treasurer: E. Miller
410-686-0545

Secretary: A. Ashwell
7840 Denton Ave.
Baltimore Md. 21219
410-477-0798

August 15, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Md. 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Md. 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

There has been a mutual agreement between the Maryland Department of Transportation and Maryland's Department of Natural Resources since 1996, for oyster propagation.

The watermen of the state and Baltimore County would like to see this relationship continue for the health of the bay and economy.

Very Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Blair Baltus".

Blair Baltus
President
Baltimore County Watermen's Association
410-952-6249



Chesapeake Bay Seafood Industries Association

311-A Third Street * Annapolis, MD 21403 * Phone: 410-507-3249 * CBSIA@comcast.net

August 11, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

For nearly thirty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

Specifically, the funding supports the production and planting of hatchery seed and spat-on-shell in sanctuaries and on aquaculture oyster leases. It also supports the management and monitoring of these plantings along with citizen engagement efforts such as the Marylanders Grow Oysters Program. The other portion of the funding is allocated to the tidal counties of Maryland to implement in-water oyster replenishment projects which are recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a best management practice. DNR consults with conservation organizations, County Oyster Committees, and aquaculturists to develop an annual-work plan, helping to ensure that all projects are ecologically and economically sustainable.

For years, MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the environmental importance of our native oyster populations. Unfortunately, this year MPA abruptly ended the ORA with no notice, which meant that all mitigation activities planned for this year would have been halted. DNR

President, Jack Brooks; Vice President, Robin Hall; Secretary Treasurer, Bill Brooks; Executive Vice President, Bill Stelling
Board Members: Clay Brooks, Jerry Harris, Jay Newcomb, Casey Todd, Roy Todd, Aubrey Vincent, and Joe Spurry

provided gap funding from their budget so that the planned projects could continue, but their gap funding is only providing partial and temporary relief. Additionally, while we greatly appreciate DNR's efforts, we feel strongly that it is not their responsibility to mitigate the impact of the Port's channel dredging activities in the Chesapeake Bay.

It is not every day that conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of this situation. With the recent increase in natural spat set, every dollar is critical for the placement of substrate, seed, and spat-on-shell. Every day that we lose also pushes Maryland further and further from reaching our Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals.

We are therefore urging MPA to keep their commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Jack Brooks
President
Chesapeake Bay Seafood Industries Association



5209 Walnut Landing Road
Vienna, Maryland 21069
443-521-1938

July 31, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
103 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
14 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone:

For the past twenty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations for the transportation of waterborne commerce Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, Maryland's aquaculture industry and improving water quality for additional bay species. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

Specifically, the funding supports the production and planting of hatchery seed and spat-on-shell in sanctuaries and on aquaculture oyster leases. It also supports the management and monitoring of these plantings along with citizen engagement efforts such as the Marylanders Grow Oysters Program. The other portion of the funding is allocated to the tidal counties of Maryland to implement in-water oyster replenishment projects which are recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a best management practice. DNR consults with

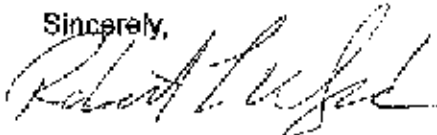
conservation organizations, County Oyster Committees, and aquaculturists to develop an annual work plan, helping to ensure that all projects are ecologically and economically sustainable.

For years, MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the environmental importance of our native oyster populations. Unfortunately, this year MPA abruptly ended the ORA with no notice, which meant that all mitigation activities planned for this year would have been halted. DNR provided gap funding from their budget so that the planned projects could continue, but their gap funding is only providing partial and temporary relief. Additionally, while we greatly appreciate DNR's efforts, we feel strongly that it is not their responsibility to mitigate the impact of the Port's channel dredging activities in the Chesapeake Bay.

It is not every day that conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of this situation. With the recent increase in natural spat set, every dollar is critical for the placement of substrate, seed, and spat-on-shell. Every day that we lose also pushes Maryland further and further from reaching our Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals.

We are therefore urging MPA to keep their commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Robert L. Whaples
President



August 11, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
II-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

For nearly thirty years, the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) have collaborated with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. Dredging in the Port of Baltimore is still being conducted and continues to impact on the oyster resource and watermen community whose livelihood is tied to the Bay. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

The funding supports the production and planting of hatchery seed, substrate and spat-on-shell in sanctuaries and aquaculture oyster leases. It also supports the management and monitoring of these plantings. The other portion of the funding is allocated to the tidal counties of Maryland to implement in-water oyster replenishment projects which are recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as an aquaculture best management practice. The replenishment projects plants over one-hundred thousand bushels of aged oyster shell and hundreds of millions spat on shell annually, by privately-operated Maryland shellfish businesses who have the equipment, vessels, and knowledge to cost effectively conduct these aquaculture activities. DNR consults with conservation organizations, County Oyster Committees, and

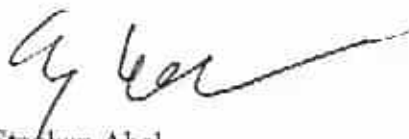
aquaculturists to develop an annual work plan, helping to ensure that all projects are ecologically and economically sustainable.

For years, MDOT / MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the environmental and economic importance of our native oyster populations. Unfortunately, this year MPA abruptly ended the ORA with no notice, which meant that all mitigation activities planned for this year would have been halted. DNR provided gap funding from their budget so that the planned projects could continue, but their gap funding is only providing partial and temporary relief. Additionally, while we greatly appreciate DNR's efforts, the community at large feels strongly that it is not their responsibility to mitigate the impact of the Port's channel dredging activities in the Chesapeake Bay.

It is not often that conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of this issue. Therefore, we are urging MDOT / MPA to keep their financial commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue on behalf of the businesses, like Ferry Cove, who have dedicated our time, efforts and resources to achieve these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Stephan Abel
President / CEO
Ferry Cove Shellfish



Green Pearl, LLC
Easton, Maryland

July 24, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

Green Pearl LLC is a seven-year-old aquaculture company on Maryland's Eastern Shore. We have three aquaculture leases with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) where we grow and harvest oysters. Being involved in this industry we continuously apply spat on shell to our lease areas. Oysters are not only a revenue source to those in the industry, but far more important perhaps the best and most natural method for cleaning the waters of the Chesapeake.

It is not every day that conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of the lack of funding for the Oyster Recovery Agreement. With the recent increase in natural spat set, every dollar is critical for the placement of substrate, seed, and spat-on-shell. Every day that we lose also pushes Maryland further and further from reaching our Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals.

Specifically, the funding supports the production and planting of hatchery seed and spat-on-shell in sanctuaries and on aquaculture oyster leases. It also supports the management and monitoring of these plantings along with citizen engagement efforts such as the Marylanders Grow Oysters Program. The other portion of the funding is allocated to the tidal counties of Maryland to implement in-water oyster replenishment projects which are recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a best management practice. DNR consults with conservation organizations, County Oyster Committees, and aquaculturists to develop an annual work plan, helping to ensure that all projects are ecologically and economically sustainable.

For years, MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the environmental importance of our native oyster populations. Unfortunately, this year MPA abruptly ended the ORA with no notice, which meant that all mitigation activities planned for this year would have been halted. DNR provided gap funding from their budget so that the planned projects could continue, but their gap funding is only providing partial and temporary relief. Additionally, while we greatly appreciate DNR's efforts, we feel strongly that it is not their responsibility to mitigate the impact of the Port's channel dredging activities in the Chesapeake Bay.

For the past twenty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

We are therefore urging MPA to keep their commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Green Pearl, LLC



By: William F. Cockayne, Authorized Member



MARYLAND
OYSTERMEN
ASSOCIATION

P.O. BOX 290
ROCK HALL, MD 21661
www.MDOYSTERMEN.org

MOA BOD Members

Jim Mullin
Executive Director

Bunky Chance
Jimmy Eline
Jimmy Kahl
Chuckie White
Wayne Wilson

"The Bay's A Big Place
And There's Room For
Everybody"

August 15, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson & Chair Guzzone,

Since 1996 there has been a mutual agreement between the Maryland Department of Transportation and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources for the Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program (Oyster Recovery). The goals and objectives of the agreement address mitigation for the environmental impacts from state dredging to enhance the transportation of waterborne commerce. The mitigation process has had a positive impact on the resource-based economies of the tidewater counties of the state.

The agreement and its overall goals and objectives of providing economic development, sustainable employment and recovery from impacts of state dredging for improved water quality are in danger of being extinguished and we respectfully request that the overall program be continued for the health of the state's economy and the health of the bay.

Thank you for your time & consideration,

James T. Mullin, Executive Director

Cc: Robert T. Brown, President
Maryland Waterman's Association



The Maryland Watermen's Association, Inc.

3 August 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone

The Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for the past 20 years under the Oyster Recovery Agreement to mitigate the channel dredging operations (which is degrading of water quality with silt and other unknown hazard waste).

The funds have improved the Oyster Industry by planting spat on shells, wild seed, and oyster shells. These oyster shells are of high value as sub straight, which rebuild the Natural Oyster bars. These funds are distributed to tidal Counties of Maryland. In conjunction with the DNR, the County Oyster Committee's and the Oyster Recovery Partnership (ORP) have developed best management plan that enhances a sustainable oyster industry.

Harvest fell to an all-time recorded low of 26,000 (25,843) bushels in 2003- 2004 season. This recorded decline was due to the 4-year drought that occurred from 1999 to 2002. The prolonged drought elevated salinity and accelerated oyster disease and mortality.

With funding from MPA and best management practices our oyster industry is not only sustainable but has increased the water quality and helped increase natural spat set. These funds need to be reinstated to continue this valuable industry's recovery, as harvest has been proven with the latest data from 2022-2023 of 722,850 bushels harvest and 2023-2024 of 437,536 due only decreasing due to demand. The Maryland Watermen's Association asks the legislators to assist in reinstalling these valuable funds for the environment, economy, and continued sustainability. Thank you for your time in this matter and we look forward to speaking with you.

Very Respectfully,

ROBERT T BROWN, SR.
PRESIDENT
MARYLAND WATERMEN'S ASSOCIATION, INC.



MILES RIVER YACHT CLUB

PH 410-745-9511

P. O. Box 158

www.milesriveryc.org

FX 410-745-2602

St. Michaels, MD 21663

Commodore Nick Simpson
Vice Commodore Dennis Kelly
Rear Commodore Matt Kealy

Fleet Captain Andrew Southworth
Secretary Jennifer Williams
Treasurer John Hines

July 29, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Oyster Recovery Agreement

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

The Miles River Yacht Club ("MRYC") was founded on the shores of the Miles River in 1921 and is now a thriving club with over 800 members. Our mission is to stimulate interest in boating, sailing, and swimming, to promote social recreation, and to enhance the general welfare of the community.

Our membership spends much of their time on the waters of the Chesapeake Bay, our children swim on the river and learn to sail on its waters. We strongly believe

that enhancing the general welfare of our community involves protecting and improving the quality of the waters of the Bay.

We strongly believe that by far the best and most natural method for cleaning the waters of the Chesapeake is to encourage and support oyster restoration. To that end many of our members, and the club itself, have participated in the Marylanders Grow Oysters Program.

It is not every day that recreational boaters, conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of the lack of funding for the Oyster Recovery Agreement. With the recent increase in natural spat set, every dollar is critical for the placement of substrate, seed, and spat-on-shell. Every day that we lose also pushes Maryland further and further from reaching our Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals.

Specifically, the funding supports the production and planting of hatchery seed and spat-on-shell in sanctuaries and on aquaculture oyster leases. It also supports the management and monitoring of these plantings along with citizen engagement efforts such as the Marylanders Grow Oysters Program. The other portion of the funding is allocated to the tidal counties of Maryland to implement in-water oyster replenishment projects which are recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a best management practice. DNR consults with conservation organizations, County Oyster Committees, and aquaculturists to develop an annual work plan, helping to ensure that all projects are ecologically and economically sustainable.

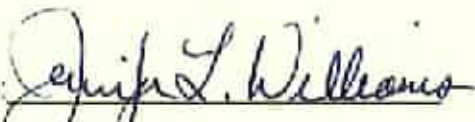
For years, MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the environmental importance of our native oyster populations. Unfortunately, this year MPA abruptly ended the ORA with no notice, which meant that all mitigation activities planned for this year would have been halted. DNR provided gap funding from their budget so that the planned projects could continue, but their gap funding is only providing partial and temporary relief. Additionally, while we greatly appreciate DNR's efforts, we feel strongly that it is not their responsibility to mitigate the impact of the Port's channel dredging activities in the Chesapeake Bay.

For the past twenty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

We are therefore urging MPA to keep their commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Miles River Yacht Club

By: 
Jennifer L. Williams, Secretary



July 22, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone:

The Oyster Recovery Partnership (ORP), based in Annapolis and founded in 1994, is a nonprofit organization that manages much of Maryland's in-water oyster restoration efforts. Under contract with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), ORP has planted more than 13 billion juvenile oysters on both sanctuary and public reefs throughout the Maryland portion of the Chesapeake Bay. We are proud to play a central role in the successful restoration of one of Maryland's most vital natural resources.

For more than 20 years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has been an essential partner in funding Maryland's oyster restoration strategy. This funding serves to mitigate the environmental impact of the Port's ongoing channel dredging activities on native oyster populations. Along with per-bushel harvest taxes paid by the commercial industry, MPA funding has supported the planting of more than 2.4 billion juvenile oysters ("spat-on-shell") and over 1.8 million bushels of shell on public, harvestable reefs.

Since 2014, ORP has partnered with DNR to administer these public fishery repletion funds. Each year, under DNR contract, we engage commercial watermen to plant spat-on-shell and recycled oyster shells on reefs identified by Maryland's 11 County Oyster Committees. This Port-funded repletion program has contributed directly to four consecutive years of the largest commercial oyster harvests in more than 30 years.

Historically, MPA has demonstrated a strong commitment to balancing the Bay's economic and environmental priorities. However, earlier this year, MPA unexpectedly withdrew its support



for public oyster repletion. While DNR stepped in to provide limited gap funding to continue this year's projects, that funding is both partial and temporary. We greatly appreciate DNR's efforts but believe strongly that it is not the agency's responsibility to mitigate the Port's environmental impacts from dredging in the Bay.

A recent DNR study shows that Maryland's oyster population has tripled over the past two decades. Combined with record harvests, this progress clearly demonstrates that Maryland's restoration strategy is working. In recognition of this success, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency now identifies oyster restoration as a Best Management Practice (BMP), enabling the state and local governments to earn valuable nutrient reduction credits toward their Watershed Implementation Plans.

ORP is proud to stand with DNR, Maryland's commercial watermen, County Oyster Committees, conservation partners, and the seafood industry in urging the MPA to reinstate critical funding for public oyster repletion. We respectfully request your support in ensuring the continuation of this vital program.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Slacum', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ward Slacum
Executive Director
Oyster Recovery Partnership
Office: 410.990.4970 (ext 1015)
wslacum@oysterrecovery.org



Phillips Wharf Environmental Center

July 25th, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
II-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Oyster Recovery Agreement

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

The Phillips Wharf Environmental Center (PWEC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that focuses on environmental education. Our mission is to encourage, educate, and engage people of all ages with Chesapeake Bay stewardship. Our vision is a healthy Chesapeake Bay with thriving fisheries, clean water, and access for all.

Founded in 2005 in a former crab shanty on Tilghman Island, PWEC relocated to Easton Point Park in Easton, Maryland in 2022. Since 2011, PWEC has continuously worked with support of the Marylanders Grow Oysters program and the Oyster Recovery Partnership to run a participatory oyster restoration program known as Tilghman Islanders Grow Oysters. Juvenile oysters, known as spat on shell, are provided to Phillips Wharf to distribute to volunteer growers in Tilghman and along Broad and Harris Creek. Volunteers sign up to host these juvenile oysters by hanging them from their docks in cages for approximately 9 months. During this time, the volunteer growers are expected to occasionally shake the cages to help keep the oysters clean of any dirt and other debris.

At the end of the program, the cages are collected, and the juvenile oysters are planted on wild oyster reefs. Specifically, our program plants oysters in the Harris Creek Sanctuary at the direction of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and we have done so since the beginning of the oyster restoration project in Harris Creek called for in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.

It is not every day that conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of this situation. With the recent increase in natural spat set, every dollar is critical for the placement of substrate, seed, and spat-on-shell. Every day that we lose also pushes Maryland further and further from reaching our Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals.

We are therefore urging MPA to keep their commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Dr. Kristen Lycett, Executive Director

Phillips Wharf Environmental Center



Queen Anne's County Watermen's Association
108 Spruce Drive
Queen Anne, MD 21657



August 19, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

For the past twenty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with [these replenishment](#) and restoration activities.

Specifically, the funding supports the production and planting of hatchery [seed](#) and [spat-on-shell](#) in sanctuaries and on aquaculture oyster leases. It also supports the management and monitoring of these plantings along with citizen engagement efforts such as the Marylanders Grow Oysters Program. The other portion of the funding is allocated to the tidal counties of Maryland to implement in-water oyster replenishment projects which are recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a best management practice. DNR consults with conservation organizations, County Oyster Committees, and aquaculturists to develop an annual work plan, helping to ensure that all projects are ecologically and economically sustainable.

For years, MPA has worked to balance the economic importance of maintaining navigation in the Bay with the environmental importance of our native oyster populations. Unfortunately, this year MPA abruptly ended the ORA with no notice, which meant that all mitigation activities planned for this year would [have been](#) halted. DNR provided gap funding from their budget so that the planned projects could continue, but their gap funding is only providing partial and temporary relief. Additionally, while we greatly appreciate DNR's efforts, we feel strongly that it is not their responsibility to mitigate the impact of the Port's channel dredging activities in [the Chesapeake Bay](#).

It is not every day that conservationists, commercial watermen, and the aquaculture industry are on the same side of an issue which underscores the importance and urgency of this situation. With the recent increase in natural spat set, every dollar is critical for the placement of substrate, seed, and spat-on-shell. Every day that we lose also pushes Maryland further and further from reaching our Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals.

We are therefore urging MPA to keep their commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ian Horney,
President
Queen Anne's County Watermen's Association.



July 11, 2025

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Chair Guzzone,

For nearly thirty years, the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) has worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to mitigate the impacts of the Port's channel dredging operations on Maryland's oyster populations. This mitigation has been guided by a long-standing funding agreement referred to as the Oyster Recovery Agreement (ORA). Each year, ORA mitigation funding supports critical replenishment and restoration activities for Maryland's oyster sanctuaries, Maryland's public fishery, and Maryland's aquaculture industry. It also supports DNR's operations associated with these replenishment and restoration activities.

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We are therefore urging MPA to keep their commitment and ensure that these essential programs continue. We are also asking for your support on behalf of the workers and conservationists who have dedicated their time and efforts to these important sustainable harvest and restoration activities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John A. Horgan *T. Lynn Federal Sealord*



10448 Azalea Rd Berlin Md 21811

August 15, 2025

Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis Md 21401

Dear Mr. Ferguson,

I am writing to express my support for the continuation of the Oyster Mitigation Program, a mutual agreement between MDDOT and MD DNR for the Chesapeake Bay enhancement program (Oyster Recovery). This program has been instrumental in mitigating environmental impacts from state dredging to enhance transportation while having a positive impact on the resource-based economies of counties in Maryland.

The Oyster Recovery Program has not only contributed to the overall health of the Chesapeake Bay but has also played a significant role in maintaining the economy of our state. By supporting the oyster population, we are not only protecting a vital natural resource but also contributing to the livelihoods of countless Marylanders who rely on the seafood industry.

As a resident of Maryland and a waterman, I am deeply concerned about the future of our state's environment and economy. I strongly believe that the continuation of the Oyster Recovery Program is essential for the overall health of the Chesapeake Bay and the well-being of our state.

I kindly request that you, as a legislator, assist in reinstalling these valuable funds for the environment, economy, and continued oyster sustainability. Your support for this program will not only benefit the Chesapeake Bay and the people who depend on it but also ensure the long-term health and prosperity of our great state.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. I look forward to your support in continuing the Oyster Recovery Program for the benefit of all Marylanders.

Sincerely,

Earl R Gwin, Jr
President
Waterman's Association of Worcester County, Md

FWA for SB558 - Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program

Uploaded by: Benjamin Ford

Position: FWA



Favorable with Amendments to Senate Bill 558

3/30/2026

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** to SB558 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.

SB558 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 and other pending major transportation projects, 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.

We are also concerned that the wording of the bill would preclude mitigation funds from programs like the Chesapeake Bay Bridge replacement from being used for oyster mitigation in Sanctuaries and would funnel all mitigation funds into this new fund.

Accordingly, we respectfully request the following amendments:

ON PAGE 2, LINE 12, AFTER "PROJECTS" 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 3, LINE 18, STRIKE "(D)" AND INSERT, "AND (D) FOR OYSTER RESTORATION ACTIVITIES WITHIN DESIGNATED OYSTER SANCTUARIES."

AND ON PAGE 3, LINE 7, ADD "(4) 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 SB558 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

CROSSFILE Arundel Rivers Testimony FWA Bay Enhancem

Uploaded by: Elle Bassett

Position: FWA



PO Box 760 Edgewater, MD
21037

410-224-3802
www.arundelrivers.org

Testimony in **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS – Senate Bill 558: Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Established**

Environment and Transportation Committee
April 1, 2026

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT OF SB558 WITH AMENDMENTS**, on behalf of Arundel Rivers Federation. Deeply rooted in the South, West, and Rhode Rivers, Arundel Rivers Federation heals and protects our waterways and champions clean water across Maryland. Our vision is healthy waterways for all, and we achieve our mission through restoration, education and outreach, and Riverkeeper programs.

Senate Bill 558 mandates a \$2.25M annual budget in appropriations from the Transportation Trust Fund to the Department of Natural Resources for “oyster propagation and replenishment.” The Department has stated that their interpretation of this language would restrict their uses to fishery plantings only and no funding could be used for oyster sanctuary restoration. **Arundel Rivers respectfully requests and amendment to add restoration as an authorized use of these funds**, providing DNR the flexibility they need to determine how best to use the funds and to invest in “underperforming” sanctuaries.

Oysters are critical natural resources that filter our waterways, support our local watermen and economy, and provide habitat for other aquatic life. Arundel Rivers strongly supports any efforts or programs that intend to boost native oyster populations in the Chesapeake, as populations remain at critically low levels compared to historic populations. Arundel Rivers has been supporting community-based oyster restoration through the Marylanders Grow Oyster Program for over a decade on the South River.

As a current Commissioner on the Oyster Advisory Commission, I am currently working with my fellow Commissioners and the Department of Natural Resources to identify how we can address underinvested oyster sanctuaries throughout the state. This bill could address that gap if it were amended to also include supporting oyster restoration. Arundel Rivers is supportive of restoring the original intent of this partnership between the Port of Baltimore and the Department first established in the 1990s, which gave DNR the discretion to utilize funds for restoration, research, surveys, *and* replenishment for the public fishery.

Arundel Rivers Federation wholeheartedly supports investing in our native oyster populations, which will result in better water quality, a stronger economy, and enhanced habitat, and we respectfully request a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS REPORT on SB558**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elle Bassett".

Elle Bassett
South, West, and Rhode Riverkeeper
Arundel Rivers Federation

SB 558 Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Establ

Uploaded by: Humna Sharif

Position: FWA

Wednesday April 1, 2026

TO: Marc Korman Chair House Environment and Transportation Committee, and Committee Members

FROM: Michelle Dietz, Director of Government Relations, The Nature Conservancy; Amy Jacobs, Chesapeake Bay Program Director, The Nature Conservancy

POSITION: Support with Amendments SB558 Chesapeake Bay - Enhancement Program and Maryland Seafood Industry Financial Assistance Fund - Established

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports with amendments SB558 offered by Senator Bailey. For the past two decades, the world has looked to the Chesapeake Bay to learn what's possible in oyster restoration. No effort in the world matches the scale of what has been accomplished here, and TNC has been proud to support and invest in oyster restoration along with many others during this time. SB 558 seeks to codify an existing Memorandum of Understanding between the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Port of Baltimore, which would provide \$2 million in annual funding for oyster replenishment activities in the public oyster fishery.

TNC supports the oyster industry across the state. We have a history of working across sectors to leverage private, state and federal funding for its benefit. Harvesting and restoration efforts must be balanced in order to realize the many benefits oysters provide to the Chesapeake Bay, including improving the Bay's health, strengthening our state and local economies, and enhancing Maryland's culture.

TNC supports the expansion of bill language and funding to provide assistance to Maryland's Seafood industry. However, **we urge the Committee to adopt amendments which provide flexibility for DNR to determine the highest need for this funding on an annual basis defined by an annual work plan that is shared with relevant stakeholder advisory committees.** This would align the bill with how this program functioned previously and provide a means for DNR to invest in oyster sanctuaries that are impacted by transportation and dredging projects. These amendments have also been submitted by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. These amendments seek to broaden the scope of SB 558 to allow DNR to utilize Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program funding to advance oyster replenishment activities where they are most needed.

Suggested Amendments:

ON PAGE 1, LINE 21, AFTER "PROPAGATION," 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 TO THE DEPARTMENT.”

The Nature Conservancy commends Senator Bailey on introducing SB558, which will codify funding for oyster restoration and encourages the consideration of amendment language that would allow for a more expansive use of funding by DNR for restoration efforts. **Therefore, we urge a favorable with amendments report on SB 558.**

SB0558 - Chesapeake Bay - Enhancement Program and

Uploaded by: Leeza DeCheubel

Position: FWA



Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 558 - Chesapeake Bay - Enhancement Program and Maryland Seafood Industry Financial
Assistance Fund - Established
Environment and Transportation Committee
April 1, 2026

The Rural Maryland Council supports Senate Bill 558 - Chesapeake Bay - Enhancement Program and Maryland Seafood Industry Financial Assistance Fund - Established as amended. SB 558 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. The bill was recently amended to authorize the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) to issue emergency loans to watermen, providing crucial support to the seafood industry while advancing ecological restoration.

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.

By investing in oyster restoration tied to environmental impacts, SB 558 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 as of SB 558 as amended.

SB 558_Maryland LCV_FWA_Ches Bay Enhancement Progr

Uploaded by: Marisa Olszewski

Position: FWA



**MARYLAND
LEAGUE OF
CONSERVATION
VOTERS**

**Maryland LCV
Board of Directors**

Patrick Miller
Chair

Honorable Nancy Kopp
Treasurer

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Secretary

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

Kim Coble
Executive Director

April 01, 2026

Favorable with Amendment: SB 558 Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Establishment

Chair Korman and Members of the Committee:

Maryland LCV Supports SB 558 - Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Establishment with amendments. We thank Senator Bailey for his leadership on this issue.

SB 558 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. Maryland LCV believes continuing the agreement to fund the Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program at Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) through the Transportation Trust Fund is a good investment and offers appropriate mitigation efforts to support a healthy oyster population and the livelihood of Maryland watermen.

Maryland LCV is requesting the bill be amended to allow DNR to be able to continue to operate a robust program with flexibility based on determined need. For program transparency, we also ask for DNR to provide an annual work plan informing relevant stakeholders of their plans for how the funding will be utilized. This will allow DNR to continue their successful operations to restore and replenish Maryland's oyster population as they have been doing successfully with the funding received in past years.

Recommended amendments:

ON PAGE 1, LINE 21, AFTER "PROPAGATION," 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 TO THE DEPARTMENT."

Maryland LCV urges the committee to adopt the recommended amendments and report favorably on SB 558.

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

www.mdldcv.org

SB 558 - CBF - FWA - E&T.pdf

Uploaded by: Matt Stegman

Position: FWA



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Senate Bill 558 Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program - Established

Date: April 1, 2026

To: Environment & Transportation Committee

Position: FAVORABLE w/ AMENDMENT

From: Dr. Allison Colden,
MD Executive Director

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 558 WITH AMENDMENTS**. SB 558 provides a mandated appropriation from the Transportation Trust Fund annually for oyster propagation and replenishment. Amendments passed by the Senate alter the funding amount from \$2 million to \$2.25 million annually and require at least \$1.5 million to be used for oyster propagation and replenishment projects. The amended bill also establishes a financial assistance fund for watermen.

While CBF supports SB 558 and has no objections to the funding levels or assistance program, the current funding use language is too restrictive. **We urge the Committee to adopt amendments which provide flexibility for DNR to determine the highest need for this funding on an annual basis defined by an annual work plan that is shared with relevant stakeholder advisory committees.** This would align the bill with how this program has functioned previously and provide a means for DNR to invest in oyster sanctuaries that are impacted by transportation and dredging projects.

Suggested Amendments:

ON PAGE 1, LINE 21, AFTER “PROPAGATION,” 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 TO THE DEPARTMENT.”

CBF urges the Committee’s FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS report on SB 558.

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.

MARBIDCO Testimony SB 558 ENT.pdf

Uploaded by: Steve McHenry

Position: FWA



MARBIDCO

MARYLAND AGRICULTURAL AND RESOURCE-BASED
INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
1410 Forest Drive, Suite 21 ~ Annapolis, MD 21403
Office: 410-267-6807
www.marbidco.org

John Jastrzembki, *Chair* / Stephen R. McHenry, *Executive Director*

TESTIMONY STATEMENT

BILL: Senate Bill 558 (Chesapeake Bay – Enhancement Program and Maryland Seafood Industry Financial Assistance Fund – Established)

COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation

DATE: April 1, 2026

POSITION: Favorable with Amendment

The Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) supports Senate Bill 558, with an important amendment, which establishes the Maryland Seafood Industry Financial Assistance Fund (MSIFAF) under MARBIDCO, among other provisions. The MSIFAF, while broadly constituted to provide loans and other financial assistance to small businesses in the commercial seafood industry, can serve as a repository of potential federal and State aid for commercial oystermen who have just experienced a historically difficult oyster season for a variety of reasons. According to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), 1124 commercial watermen holding a Tidal Fish License (TFL) had an authorization to harvest oysters during the 2025-2026 season.

Overview of the MARBIDCO Portion of the Bill

Senate Bill 558 proposes to establish the Maryland Seafood Industry Financial Assistance Fund within MARBIDCO to broadly address the commercial financing needs of Maryland's seafood industry, and to immediately help ameliorate the current economic distress that Maryland's commercial oyster harvesters are experiencing. Maryland's commercial oyster harvesters have had their worst market season in many years for reasons that include: 1) a multi-state salmonella outbreak in December that scared off consumers; 2) the January deep freeze icing over the Bay that prevented watermen from getting out to work; and 3) most recently the huge Potomac River sewerage spill which has negatively impacted public perception concerning the consumption of oysters. The market for wild oysters from Maryland is also depressed due to increased competition from less expensive oysters that are now permitted to be harvested in the Gulf of Mexico, after a several year closure due to a large oil spill disaster. According to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), oyster harvests have declined 44%, while the dockside value of oysters has dropped 66% this season.

In response to the market disruption, on February 27, 2026, Governor Wes Moore requested a federal disaster declaration from the U.S. Department of Commerce for the Chesapeake Bay oyster fishery.

A copy of the Governor's federal declaration request can be found here: [02272026 Gov. Moore Letter to Sec. Lutnick re: Federal Fishery Disaster Declaration](#)

In addition, below are links to three recent media articles describing the situation:

<https://thebaynet.com/amid-oyster-bounty-chesapeake-bay-watermen-suffer-dismal-harvest/>

<https://marylandmatters.org/2026/02/27/maryland-requests-disaster-declaration-for-chesapeake-oyster-fishery/>

<https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/supply-trade/maryland-governor-congressional-delegation-request-disaster-designation-for-oystermen-following-icy-winds-sewage-spill>

Potential sources of funding for the MSIFAF include the federal, State, and local governments as well as non-governmental organizations.

MARBIDCO anticipates that there will also be a need in the future, as repaid loan principal monies revolve back into the Fund, to make additional loans to commercial watermen and other small businesses involved in Maryland's seafood industry. For example, the Chesapeake Bay is experiencing an enormous ecological challenge right now with the invasive Blue Catfish, where additional lower-cost commercial lending may be of significant help with removing these harmful fish from the Bay.

Senate Bill 558 would also provide statutory authorization for MARBIDCO to work with DNR regarding delinquent borrowers that hold a tidal fish license (TFL). Under the bill MARBIDCO would be required to notify DNR if a commercial waterman holding a TFL becomes delinquent on repaying a loan. Once notified, DNR would not permit a transfer of, or authorization under, the TFL until such time that MARBIDCO has notified DNR that the loan has been repaid.

Potential State Fiscal Effect

While not contained specifically within SB 558, it is believed that no-cost loans of between \$7,000 to \$10,000 made to commercial oyster harvesters would provide timely and meaningful assistance and aid in business (and personal/family) recovery during this difficult economic period. These loans could be repaid in quarterly equal installments beginning in early calendar 2027.

Assuming that 70% of the current 1,124 license-holders (787) meet the MSIFAF loan eligibility requirements established by MARBIDCO, about \$5.5 to \$7.9 million would be needed to fund the emergency loan advances described above. Under this scenario, MARBIDCO's administrative costs would be recoverable from loan repayments by the end of fiscal 2027.

The Federal Government is not expected to act on the State's Federal disaster declaration and aid request before the end of May 2026. If the State's Federal disaster declaration request is approved, it is possible that some or all of the Federal financial assistance received by the State could be used to reimburse the State for any monies advanced to MSIFAF in the short-term.

MARBIDCO Background Information

The Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) is a quasi-governmental development organization chartered by the State to help enhance the sustainability and profitability of the State's agricultural and resource-based industries in order to help bolster rural economies, support locally grown and processed food and fiber products, and preserve working farm and forest land. The Corporation offers several small business loan and grant incentive programs using various dedicated fund sources primarily provided by Federal, State, and regional agencies. MARBIDCO also works closely with private commercial banks on making capital and credit available for Ag/RBI projects, and routinely collaborates with MDA, DNR, RMC, Commerce, and the University of Maryland Extension (College Park and UMES), as well as the USDA mission area offices in Maryland and the five rural regional tri-county councils.

At the present time MARBIDCO offers six collateralized loan programs (for financing farm, building, and equipment purchases), six unsecured "specialty" lending programs (including four narrowly tailored ones serving the seafood industry sector – see below for more information), two Next Generation Farmland Acquisition (and combination rural land preservation) programs, and six grant incentive programs (including four that will likely run out of funding by the end of fiscal 2027).

Today, MARBIDCO is a self-sustaining enterprise that is largely "nonbudgeted". Its employees (9.8 FTEs) are not State employees. MARBIDCO's ongoing operational costs are paid for by loan interest payments, program fees and, where a grant program is involved, MARBIDCO will retain a small percentage of the grant award to cover the administrative expense associated with administering that grant program (normally around 7%). In FY 2025, MARBIDCO funded commercial projects totaling \$13.1 million and had operating expenses of \$1.6 million. (The FY 2027 State Operating Budget includes an allowance for MARBIDCO of \$200,000 for a single grant program that funds USDA-inspected livestock and blue catfish processing projects.)

MARBIDCO also handles its own financial resources independently of the State Treasurer's Office and it maintains its own bank accounts. **As such, an amendment will need to be adopted to correct an inadvertent error in the third reader version of SB 558. MARBIDCO respectfully requests that the attached amendment be adopted to rectify this problem.**

This attached amendment corrects a drafting error in a Senate-adopted floor amendment. MARBIDCO is a quasi-governmental entity (like MEDCO, TEDCO and MCEC) wherein MARBIDCO's funds are handled independently of the State Treasurer's Office once funds have been appropriated by the General Assembly or otherwise secured from other sources. This amendment will permit MARBIDCO to effectively administer the Fund, subject to the applicable statutory requirements of State law, in a manner similar to how it manages other funds. It is anticipated that loan principal repayments would revolve in the Fund, except those monies that are needed to pay for administrative expenses. In the future, if interest and fees are charged, those monies may also be used to cover administrative expenses involved in closing and servicing loans.

MARBIDCO Seafood Industry-Related Programs

MARBIDCO currently offers four narrowly targeted programs with dedicated funding that assists commercial watermen or aids in oyster production and processing:

Maryland Watermen's Microloan Program

Chapter 384 of 2022 established the Maryland Watermen's Microloan Program. The loan program provides low-interest loans for watermen to purchase commercial fishing boats, boat motors, and seafood harvesting gear. It is available to generational watermen, beginner watermen, or certain seafood processing businesses, as defined in the statute. The statute authorizes MARBIDCO to determine the eligibility of an applicant, the loan amount to be given to a borrower, the terms and conditions for a loan contract, and the amount of debt forgiveness that may be provided for loan repayment performance. The loan terms include variable interest rates and interest-only periods with majorities of 4 to 6 years, maximum loan amounts of \$40,000, and partial forgiveness of the last 25% of the loan term based on loan performance.

Maryland Oyster Shucking House Loan Fund Program

Chapters 30 and 574 of 2022 established the Maryland Oyster Shucking House Loan Fund Program. The program provides loans up to \$250,000 to licensed seafood dealers (or to TFL holders that have had their license for 5 years and plan to become a seafood dealer) to finance the renovation, construction, or expansion of an oyster processing facility or to purchase oyster processing equipment. Loan amounts are dependent on the number of full-time or seasonal full-time jobs projected to be created or retained by the facility, at \$25,000 per job. Loan forgiveness is available based on the value of bushels of oyster shells returned to DNR at no cost (verified by DNR) or \$25 per bushel of spat-on-shell planted on a public fishery bottom.

Maryland Shellfish Aquaculture Financing Fund & Maryland Shellfish Remote Setting Financing Fund

Beginning in 2011, MARBIDCO established two loan programs with funding facilitated by DNR, to help support the development of the shellfish aquaculture industry in Maryland (the vast majority of borrowers being oyster farmers). The Maryland Shellfish Aquaculture Financing Fund provides low-interest loans to people holding State submerged land or water column aquaculture leases (or who have applied for such leases). Funds can be used to purchase shell/substrate, seed, spat, or equipment. The Maryland Remote Setting Shellfish Aquaculture Loan Fund provides low-interest loans to people holding a DNR shellfish nursery permit to start or expand shellfish remote setting (nursery) aquaculture operations.

Since 2007, MARBIDCO has funded 80 projects for commercial watermen, 23 seafood processing projects, one oyster shucking house loan (with one request pending), and 235 shellfish aquaculture projects. (Approximately one-third of these 338 projects were for small grants made during the COVID Pandemic period using federal funds.)

Conclusion

We believe that establishing the Maryland Seafood Industry Financing Assistance Fund within MARBIDCO will potentially facilitate an opportunity to provide meaningful financial relief to Maryland's watermen at a time when many are experiencing dire economic distress. **As such, MARBIDCO respectfully requests a Favorable with Amendment Report for Senate Bill 558.**

MARBIDCO Contact: Steve McHenry, 410.267.6807

To Be Offered in the House ENT Committee

Amendment to Senate Bill 558 (Third Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT

On page 3, strike lines 22 and 23 in their entirety; in line 26 strike “FEES AND LOAN REPAYMENTS, INCLUDING INTEREST,” and substitute “LOAN PRINCIPAL REPAYMENTS”; on page 4, strike lines 6 through 9 in their entirety; and on page 4 in line 10, strike “(J) and substitute “(H)”.

RATIONALE:

This amendment corrects a drafting error in a Senate-adopted floor amendment. The Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) is a quasi-governmental entity (like MEDCO, TEDCO, and MCEC) wherein MARBIDCO’s funds are handled independently of the State Treasurer’s Office once funds have been appropriated by the General Assembly or otherwise secured from other sources. This amendment will permit MARBIDCO to effectively administer the Fund, subject to the applicable statutory requirements in the Economic Development Article, in a manner similar to how it manages other dedicated funds. It is anticipated that loan principal repayments would revolve in the Fund, except those monies that are needed to pay for administrative expenses. In the future, if interest and fees are charged, those monies may also be used to cover administrative expenses involved in closing and servicing loans.

SB0558_DNR_LOI_ENT_4-1-26.pdf

Uploaded by: Lydia McPherson

Position: INFO



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

April 1, 2026

BILL NUMBER: SENATE BILL 558 - THIRD READER

SHORT TITLE: CHESAPEAKE BAY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM AND MARYLAND SEAFOOD INDUSTRY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FUND - ESTABLISHED

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: LETTER OF INFORMATION

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION

Since 1997, the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) has provided a grant to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to be used solely for the purpose of oyster recovery within Maryland waters of the Chesapeake Bay. This funding has been used to fund a variety of shellfish program operations.

DNR has worked closely with MDOT over the past several months to not only fully restore all \$2 million in funding for FY 2026 oyster reseeded program, but is currently in the process of entering into a new, multi-year MOU.

The Maryland Seafood Industry Financial Assistance Fund, through the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation, would provide additional financial assistance to tidal fish licensees who qualify.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There is a history of agreements between MDOT and DNR since 1997 for the purposes of funding oyster recovery in the waters of the Chesapeake Bay.

Bushel and severance taxes and the oyster surcharge are a major revenue source for the Department's shellfish division, however, the utility of this funding is restricted to repletion of the natural oyster bars of the State by Natural Resources Articles 4-701 and 4-1020 Annotated Code and cannot be used for the studies or assessments necessary to manage this fishery.

BILL EXPLANATION

The bill, as amended, would add \$2.25 million to the annual budget bill for FY 28 and each FY after for an appropriation to the program from the Transportation Trust Fund in the Transportation Article. The amended bill requires an allocation of at least \$1.5 million of the funds to be used for oyster propagation and replenishment programs. The amended bill also creates a Maryland Seafood Industry Financial Assistance Fund through the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation.

Contact: Lydia McPherson, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services
lydia.mcpherson1@maryland.gov ♦ 410-260-8113 (office) ♦ 443-875-7785 (cell)

SB0558 - LOI - MPA - Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Pr

Uploaded by: Patricia Westervelt

Position: INFO

April 1, 2026

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

RE: Letter of Information – Senate Bill 558 – Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program – Established

Dear Chair Korman and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) takes no position on Senate Bill 558 but offers the following information for the committee's consideration.

SB 558, as amended, would establish a Chesapeake Bay Enhancement Program at the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to provide funding for oyster propagation and replenishment programs. This program would be funded through a mandated appropriation of \$2.25 million from the Transportation Trust Fund annually beginning in Fiscal Year 2028.

MDOT understands the vital importance of the oyster population to the health and economy of the Chesapeake Bay, and since 2005, it has provided funding from the Transportation Trust Fund toward oyster propagation and replenishment activities through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between MDOT and DNR. Last fall, MDOT fully restored all \$2 million in funding for FY 2026 for the oyster reseedling program consistent with the existing MOU. While the MOU ends in FY 2026, MDOT and DNR have begun conversations to enter into a new, multi-year MOU. Additionally, MDOT has budgeted \$2 million in FY 2027 to show its commitment to continuing this partnership with DNR. MDOT will keep the General Assembly informed as the conversations regarding the new MOU continue. In next year's draft Consolidated Transportation Program, MDOT will fully fund the term of the multi-year MOU.

In advancing this new MOU, MDOT will note the broad nexus between oysters, the health of the Bay, and transportation-related impacts. MDOT and DNR will also work to ensure the funds directly support the repletion and restoration of oysters and oyster beds within the Chesapeake Bay relative to administrative costs.

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully request the Committee consider this information when deliberating Senate Bill 558.

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Mickler
Director of Government Affairs
Maryland Department of Transportation
410-865-1090

Jennifer Guthrie
Director of Government Affairs
Maryland Port Administration
443-255-8980