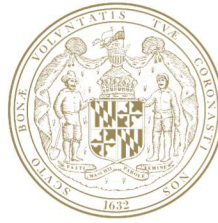


JEFFERSON L. GHRIST
Co-CHAIR

NATALIE ZIEGLER
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
HOUSE RURAL CAUCUS

March 27, 2026

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

Chair Korman and Honorable Members of the Environment & Transportation Committee:

On behalf of the Rural Caucus, we are writing to express our support **for SB 558 Chesapeake Bay - Enhancement Program and Maryland Seafood Industry Financial Assistance Fund - Established.**

This legislation directly addresses an urgent economic crisis affecting Maryland's rural and coastal communities, particularly commercial watermen and oyster harvesters who are facing unprecedented financial hardship. With the oyster industry suffering through perhaps their worst season in living memory due to the Potomac River sewage spill, salmonella concerns, and the January deep-freeze, existing programs through MARBIDCO lack the capacity to provide the large-scale emergency loans needed to stabilize these small businesses.

SB558 provides for these loans and strengthens coordination between MARBIDCO and the Department of Natural Resources to enable more effective loan administration and access to critical financial support for licensed watermen. By facilitating timely emergency lending and supporting the long-term resilience of the seafood industry, the bill helps protect jobs, sustain rural economies, and preserve Maryland's vital agricultural and natural resource sectors.

For these reasons, the Rural Caucus supports SB 558 and requests a favorable report.

Thank you,

Handwritten signature of Jefferson L. Ghrist in black ink.

Delegate Jefferson L. Ghrist
Co-Chair

Handwritten signature of Natalie Ziegler in black ink.

Delegate Natalie Ziegler
Co-Chair