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RECREATIONAL ANGLERS FIGHTING FOR MARYLAND'S MARINE RESOURCES

March 6, 2015

To: Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Chair
Honorable Dana Stein, Vice-Chair
Honorable Members of the House Environment and Transportation
Committee

Re: **House Bill 1002** Natural Resources – County Oyster Committees – Authority
CCA Maryland Position: **Unfavorable**

CCA Maryland strongly opposes a favorable report from the House Environment and Transportation Committee on House Bill 1002.

After oyster harvests had declined by 90% over the previous century, the Repletion Program was begun in 1962 to improve the harvest of oysters by using a large hydraulic dredge to extract fossil oyster shells from the northern Bay waters, barge them to the lower Bay where salinities are higher and spat set was the best in Maryland. The next year this shell with spat in place was again dredged up and then transported to more northern areas of the Bay where reproduction was poor to supplement the harvest of oysters – not to benefit the oyster population but to benefit oystermen with shorter commutes to their target.

This put-and-take fishery accomplished with ever increasing taxpayer funding had some initial success and harvests increased while sustainability was ignored. As time went on and costs went up the harvests soon began a decline and later in the 80's it dived with diseases that spread throughout the Bay quickly on the very barges transporting oysters and shells around the Bay.

In its last years, the Repletion Program, was costing taxpayers on the order of \$5-7 million per year while harvesters realized gross revenues of less than \$1 million as best as could be determined with minimal transparency at the time. CCA MD was able to help end the program in 2005. After moving a pile of fossil oyster shell the size of a football field and two miles high, few of those shells can even be found and shell has become an expensive commodity throughout the country.

The County Oyster Committees received some funding from taxpayer sources and from the \$1 per bushel surcharge collected when sold to distributors or shucking houses. This surcharge is actually a pass-through paid by consumers in the end. Some County Oyster Committees chose their planting sites well and others chose sites with mud bottoms but in the end, the statewide

oyster harvest was 26,000 bushels in 2004, a decline of 98% for the 42 years of the Repletion Program.

In the last decade, a great deal of scientific research was done on oysters and our government leaders, academia and the Oyster Advisory Commission developed a plan to restore oysters in sanctuaries and promote sustainable oyster production via aquaculture. Reproduction, augmented with expanded sanctuaries and restoration efforts with our federal partners have revived the harvests up to the 400,000 to 500,000 bushels range.

This Bill would target those now unused County Oyster Committee Funds, take them out of state control and oversight, and allow these oystermen to compete for shell and guide its use with no scientific method to determine sites or method of planting, care or harvest. Once again they would take taxpayer funds for their private profit and reenter the same failed methods of the Repletion Program.

CCA MD strongly urges you to provide an unfavorable vote on **HB 1002** and help us move forward with sustainable harvests of oysters as our sanctuaries increase their reproductive capacity.