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COASTAL
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MARYLAND

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 419** Natural Resources - Aquaculture Leases – Consideration of User
Conflicts
CCA Maryland Position: **Unfavorable**

CCA Maryland strongly opposes a favorable report from the House Environment and Transportation Committee on House Bill 419.

For millennia, the foundation of the rich marine ecosystems in the Chesapeake Bay was vast, three-dimensional reefs known as oyster bars. Overharvest, disease, and pollution have left the Chesapeake Bay's oyster population at record lows, creating a void of essential habitat, and areas which are void of life. Five years ago, this very committee recognized their responsibility to change direction and conserve and protect enlarged oyster sanctuaries and promote the sustainable oyster and clam aquaculture industry by unanimous consent.

Through the aquaculture lease approval process, DNR analyzes many criteria and works to limit conflict or overlap of productive wild oyster bars, channels for boating and navigation, water quality, pound nets, and riparian rights with aquaculture leases. HB419 would now require a determination that an aquaculture lease can only be approved when no other commercial fishing licensee has any interest in that area. Given the need for alternative oyster growth and harvest options the state of Maryland should be promoting a fair and inclusive process to promote an increase in the number and size of oyster aquaculture production areas. Both restored oyster bars and oyster farming operations promote the growth of rich benthic communities of filter feeders that the bay desperately needs. Any attempts to further complicate the application and approval process for oyster aquaculture operations should be seen as a step in the wrong direction for Maryland.

Conflict or a concern of future conflict does exist between oyster aquaculture operations and those participate in hydraulic clamming, trotlining for crabs At this time DNR is well suited to mitigating these conflicts. All stakeholders agree that the bay needs more habitat and more

oysters. Aquaculture is the best available option for a sustainable and economically viable future for oyster harvest in Maryland's portion of Chesapeake Bay.

CCA MD strongly urges you to provide an unfavorable report on **HB 419** and protect the ability to lease areas of the Bay for oyster aquaculture operations to thrive and provide both ecological and economic benefits to Maryland.