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RECREATIONAL ANGLERS
WORKING TO CONSERVE, PROMOTE, AND ENHANCE MARYLAND'S
MARINE RESOURCES

February 24, 2017

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

Re: **House Bill 0924** Natural Resources – Oyster Management – Prohibited Actions

CCA Maryland Position: **Support**

Coastal Conservation Association Maryland (CCA MD) recommends a favorable report on HB 0924.

This Bill does not remove the ability of DNR to manage the public oyster fishery; it simply aims to use the currently pending and ongoing stock assessment process to provide scientific and fact-based guidance to sustainably manage our oyster population as a whole for the benefit of all citizens of the state- including the commercial industry.

As a long-standing participant in fisheries management in Maryland, CCA MD supports the use of the best available science as part of a Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) to achieve the sustainable management of our publicly held natural resources. Maryland's oyster population continues to be brood stock and habitat limited. In other words, it is generally lacking adult oysters in specific densities to successfully spawn to maintain or increase the population Bay-wide. Studies tells us that in order to reverse this basic problem then 20-30% of our oyster bottom should be protected long term so these mature oysters can serve as a brood stock for populations outside of the protected areas

The harvest of wild oysters has continued to decline since reaching a peak in the 2013-14 season. While the harvest level report for the current 2016-17 has not been completed, anecdotal evidence suggests that the oyster industry has struggled to catch full daily bushel limits and the harvest is significantly lower. This demonstrates a lack of oysters in the public shellfish fishery harvest areas. Because such a lack of market sized oysters exists, it would suggest that the industry's intense harvest has exceeded the natural ability of oysters to repopulate (even with watermen "working the bars") and that overharvesting is occurring. Given this issue, the opening of sanctuaries to harvest by the commercial industry would only undermine the ability of all areas to repopulate. As has been demonstrated time and time (and time) again, it would only provide a short-term gain for a few that ignores the overall needs of the Chesapeake Bay and the interests of all of Maryland's citizens.

Oysters are the ecological foundation of the Chesapeake Bay. The best science available must be used to manage our wild fishery and sanctuaries. Sanctuaries should not be used as harvest reserve areas for when public bars are mismanaged and over harvested. For these reasons, CCA Maryland respectfully recommends a favorable report from the committee on HB 924.