

February 22, 2023

Delegate Kumar P. Barve  
Chair  
Environment and Transportation Committee  
251 Taylor House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Delegate Dana Stein  
Vice Chair  
Environment and Transportation Committee  
251 Taylor House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Barve and Vice Chair Stein:

The undersigned organizations, representing thousands of anglers in Maryland, and tens of thousands nationally, strongly support HB 696, a bill to establish a Black Bass Conservation Fund within the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR). This new, voluntary funding mechanism will not only benefit one of Maryland's most iconic sportfish species but could also serve as a model for other states for addressing specific fisheries conservation needs.

According to the 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, nearly 9.6 million anglers spent 117 million days fishing for black bass (largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, spotted bass, etc.), indicating that black bass are the most sought after and valued freshwater sportfish species in the nation. Black bass are clearly a resource worth investing in, and HB 696 provides an avenue to generate additional resources for restoring and enhancing black bass populations in the state. Through habitat restoration efforts, supplemental stocking to increase or maintain population abundance, assistance with post-release survival following bass tournaments, and additional research opportunities, HB 696 provides an opportunity to address black bass conservation needs across the board.

Recruitment, retention and reactivation of anglers has been a major goal of state agencies across the nation. Through the American System of Conservation Funding, the more anglers we have, the more license dollars and excise taxes on fishing equipment that are available for fisheries conservation. High school bass fishing competitions are one of the fastest growing youth sports in the nation and are more inclusive for students regardless of athletic abilities, compared to traditional high school sports. The excitement and media coverage around high school and college bass fishing tournaments generates interest in fishing for kids and their parents, and providing for healthy bass fisheries and a rewarding fishing experience encourages families to take up fishing as a lifetime recreational hobby.

In closing, we urge the Committee to favorably report HB 696 and ensure the future of one of Maryland's most important fisheries.

Sincerely,

American Catfishing Association  
American Sportfishing Association  
Bass Anglers Sportsman Society  
Coastal Conservation Association

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation  
Major League Fishing  
National Professional Anglers Association  
The Bass Federation