



## Maryland Charter Boat Association, Inc.

March 24, 2026

Governor Wes Moore  
State House  
100 State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Honorable Wes Moore,

The members of the charter boat industry have learned that SB755 did not make it to crossover. This is deeply concerning, as this legislation represents a balanced and necessary step toward both protecting the spawning stock of striped bass during the critical spawning season and preserving Maryland's charter boat industry — a vital contributor to the state's tourism economy.

SB755 is not simply a conservation measure; it is also an economic lifeline. The bill acknowledges the urgent need to protect striped bass while recognizing the significant financial hardship currently facing Maryland's charter fleet. The charter boat industry supports responsible conservation, but we must also ensure that the burden of conservation is shared fairly and does not disproportionately threaten one sector.

**A major concern is that the fiscal analysis conducted on the original bill does not reflect the amendments proposed by the charter boat industry.** These amendments significantly change the operational and economic impacts of the bill, meaning the previous fiscal assessment is no longer accurate. With the amended version, the fiscal footprint would be substantially different and should be reevaluated accordingly.

We also understand that the Department of Natural Resources has objected to this bill, in part because it would require a socioeconomic impact study. However, such a study is precisely what is needed. A thorough review would clearly demonstrate the severe economic harm currently being experienced due to disruptions in the charter boat industry.

At present, approximately 70–75% of Maryland's charter boat businesses are insolvent. Many of the remaining operators report minimal bookings for the upcoming summer season, largely due to extended closures and the current one-fish regulation. Without meaningful relief, many of these small businesses may not survive.

Beyond the economic impact to charter operators, these restrictions also significantly affect the general public. Charter boats provide access to fishing opportunities for individuals and families who cannot afford to own and maintain a private boat. For many Maryland residents and visiting tourists, charter boats are the only realistic way to experience striped bass fishing on the Chesapeake Bay. **Limiting the charter boat season effectively disenfranchises these individuals, restricting access to a public resource and creating**

**an uneven playing field where only those who can afford private vessels retain meaningful fishing opportunities.**

Further, there is growing concern about equity among fishing sectors:

- Commercial striped bass fishermen can harvest approximately 9½ months per year
- Recreational anglers can target striped bass approximately 11 months per year
- The charter boat industry, however, is limited to only 6 months per year

**This disparity appears inconsistent with the Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act, which states: “The Department shall not discriminate between commercial, for-hire, and recreational fisheries.”** The current situation raises legitimate concerns regarding unequal treatment and disproportionate economic impact.

Moving forward with SB755 would not make the charter boat industry completely whole, but it would provide a meaningful opportunity for recovery and sustainability. Without this legislation, Maryland risks losing tens of millions of dollars in tourism revenue — economic activity that directly supports coastal communities, small businesses, and local jobs.

We respectfully urge that SB755 be referred to the Rules Committee and advanced for adoption by the Governor. This matter is urgent. As it stands today, the majority of Maryland charter captains have only a minimal number of bookings for the upcoming season, placing their livelihoods — and the broader tourism economy — at risk.

Advancing this bill would demonstrate thoughtful leadership and a commitment to both conservation and economic fairness. It would also send a strong message to the people of Maryland that this administration recognizes the value of small businesses, coastal communities, and responsible fisheries management — while also ensuring fair access to public resources for all citizens, not just those with the means to own private boats.

We respectfully request swift action to move SB755 forward and help preserve Maryland’s charter boat industry before further economic damage occurs.

Respectfully,

*Brian L Hardman*

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