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Testimony in Support of House Bill 143 – State Boat Act – Abandoned or Sunken Vessels – Removal – (Del. Kipke)

February 12, 2020

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 143 – the State Boat Act – on behalf of Waterkeepers Chesapeake. Waterkeepers Chesapeake is a coalition of seventeen Waterkeepers, Riverkeepers, and Coastkeepers working to make the waters of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays swimmable and fishable. Maryland Waterkeepers have an interest ensuring healthy and thriving aquatic habitats across the state.

Under the current law, abandoned or sunken vessels are defined as any vessel that has remained at a private marina, boatyard, or dock for more than 90 days without the property owner’s consent. The vessel can only be removed after property owner and the Department of Natural Resources jump through a myriad of bureaucratic hoops, to include - sending two certified letters requesting the vessel be removed once the vessel’s owner is tracked down..

Abandoned vessels create hazardous conditions in Maryland waterways, burden property owners, and drain public resources. DNR’s Abandoned Boat and Debris Program Administrator stated that there are usually about 35 to 40 abandoned vessels in a given year. Still, 2019 saw a drastic increase. There were 41 abandoned vessels in just the first half of 2019.¹ Many of these vessels continue to leak oil and gas into the water as they sit waiting to be removed. Meanwhile, the vessels create obstacles that limit free movement throughout Maryland’s waterways or pose dangers as they sink below the surface. Most of the abandoned vessels are left by owners who fail to insure the vessel.²

HB 143 seeks to alleviate private property owners and the public of the burdens and eyesores of abandoned vessels in a timely manner by reducing the waiting period from 90 to 30 days before appropriate action can be taken. Removing abandoned vessels as soon as possible will leave Maryland waterways safe and open to the public to enjoy while the DNR continues to seek appropriate remedies from the abandoned vessel’s owner.

¹ Abandoned Boat Cases Surge in 2019, *Chesapeake Bay Magazine* (June 11, 2019)
<https://chesapeakebaymagazine.com/abandoned-boat-cases-surge-in-2019/>.

² Taylor Deville, *Abandoned boat slowly sinking in Patuxent*, Southern Maryland News (Aug. 24, 2018)
https://www.somdnews.com/enterprise/spotlight/abandoned-boat-slowly-sinking-in-patuxent/article_4da3e3a0-4995-59fe-bf89-d66f458b1774.html.

Anacostia Riverkeeper
Assateague Coastkeeper
Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper
Chester Riverkeeper
Choptank Riverkeeper
Gunpowder Riverkeeper
Lower James Riverkeeper

Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper
Middle Susquehanna Riverkeeper
Miles-Wye Riverkeeper
Potomac Riverkeeper
Sassafras Riverkeeper
Severn Riverkeeper

Shenandoah Riverkeeper
South Riverkeeper
Upper James Riverkeeper
Upper Potomac Riverkeeper
Virginia Eastern Shorekeeper
West Rhode Riverkeeper





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Waterkeepers Chesapeake is a strong proponent of measures that safeguard our waterways, ensure aquatic habitat health, and provide a path for the resurgence of the Chesapeake Bay. For these reasons, the undersigned Waterkeepers, Riverkeepers and Coastkeepers urge the Committee to adopt a favorable report on House Bill 143.

Sincerely,

Betsy Nicholas
 Executive Director
 Waterkeepers Chesapeake

Anacostia Riverkeeper
 Assateague Coastkeeper
 Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper
 Chester Riverkeeper
 Choptank Riverkeeper
 Gunpowder Riverkeeper
 Lower James Riverkeeper

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