



Larry Hogan, Governor
Boyd Rutherford, Lt. Governor
Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, Secretary

February 25, 2021

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Chair, Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Dana Stein
Vice Chair, Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Letter of Information – House Bill 1117 – Kent Narrows Bridge – State Highway Right-of-Way – Fishing Prohibition

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources respectfully provides the following information on House Bill 1117. This bill will prohibit pedestrians from catching fish by any means within the State Highway right-of-way of the Kent Narrows Bridge in Queen Anne's County.

Persons fishing from the Old Kent Narrows Bridge on Maryland Route 18 is a frequent occurrence that potentially endangers the safety of the person fishing from the bridge due the proximity of passing traffic. Fishing from this bridge also poses a potential hazard to recreational boaters and commercial fishermen passing beneath, as they are occasionally hit by fishing gear being cast from the bridge and have become entangled in abandoned gear left suspended from the bridge.

It has come to the attention of the department that HB 1117 as introduced could have a more expansive applicability than what was the original intention of the bill sponsor. It is important to ensure that any new prohibitions apply solely to the small pedestrian access along the shoulders of the Old Kent Narrows Bridge. The department would not support the unintentional restriction of public fishing in any other area around the Kent Narrows Bridge on Maryland Route 50. We intend to work with the bill sponsor and the committee to ensure the bill is adequately amended as necessary to allow for safe boating and fishing activity.

HB 1117 places the prohibition in the Transportation Article allowing for enforcement by all state and local law enforcement officers, including Natural Resources Police, because every agency has the ability to write transportation violations. Conversely, if this prohibition was drafted to the Natural Resources Article, only Natural Resources Police has the means to write citations. Further enforceability could be added to the bill with

additional language “or attempt to catch fish” on Page 1, Line 16. The language would allow law enforcement officers to take necessary action to protect the health and safety of all concerned based upon the officer’s observation of a person deploying fishing gear from the bridge, rather than needing to wait for a person to actually catch a fish.

Thank you for allowing the department to submit this information on HB 1117 for the committee’s careful consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

James W. McKitrick
Director, Legislative and Constituent Service