



**Testimony in Support with amendments of House Bill 602 –
Environment – State Wetlands – Shoreline Restoration**

February 20, 2023

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support with amendments for HB602**, on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland’s Eastern Shore with more than 2,000 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education. **Additionally, please also see the testimony below from ShoreRivers member Gene Lopez for your consideration.**

At ShoreRivers, shoreline erosion is one of the most common reasons a community member reaches out for consultation from a Riverkeeper. Almost always, we recommend living shorelines as the most beneficial solution, both for the homeowner, and for the health of the waterway. However, the cost of implementation is incredibly high due to fuel prices and the labor required to walk a project through the permitting process. As a result, many homeowners seek waivers to implement armored shorelines or do nothing at all.

HB602 seeks to curb the widespread issuance of waivers to the existing living shorelines law, requires an assessment to identify where living shorelines can be installed, and creates a fund for grants to convert degraded hardened shorelines into living shorelines.

A recent study by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration identifies that within a 1,000-foot shoreline, if 30% or greater is armored, there will be negative impacts on fish reproduction—a detriment to the biodiversity of the Chesapeake and to our local fishing economies. Additionally, as impacts of climate change increase, rising tides will spill over bulkheads and riprap, causing them to degrade and collapse. On the low-lying Eastern Shore, it is imperative that we implement the most resilient and dynamic shorelines to protect our communities.

ShoreRivers recommends an amendment to incentivize all residents to make the right choice and implement living shorelines: Grant funding should be made available to any property within a priority restoration area, not just properties with armored shorelines. Residents who live within the identified priority areas (i.e., those who are unable to secure a waiver for an armored shoreline) often take no action at all due to cost. If the goal is to implement more living shorelines across the state, then more wide-spread incentives should be incorporated into this legislation.

Living shorelines provide important habitat to estuarian life found in the Chesapeake, as well as protection from flooding and runoff—these benefits far outweigh anything provided by armored alternatives. For these reasons, we urge the committee **to adopt a favorable report, with amendments, for HB602.**

Sincerely,

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper on behalf of ShoreRivers

ShoreRivers

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher Sassafras Riverkeeper

shorerivers.org | 443.385.0511 | info@shorerivers.org

Dear Chairman and members of the Committee,

I have a living shoreline, consisting of a sill behind stone. The sill is planted in black needlerush, spartina alternifolia, hibiscus, and panicum virgatum. Solidago and Joe pye weed also grow above the high tide line. There are also several large trees close to that shoreline including southern red oak, persimmon and loblolly. **All of these plant materials have contributed to a very stable shoreline over the 25 years it's been in place.**

We have pretty good empirical evidence of that stability because our neighbor's property, contiguous to our shoreline, but without any plantings except lawn grass, has experienced serious erosion in that same time period. In addition, we have noticed wildlife making use of our shoreline, from redwing blackbirds nesting there and purple martins using the plant material to build their nests in their nest boxes on our dock. On top of that, we have observed muskrats building dens along the shore, and for two years, river otters playing along the shore in winter.

Even with the extreme high tides we have seen in the last two years or so, we have never witnessed any silt plumes in the water off our shoreline. So, between the beauty of the plant materials, the wildlife habitat present, and the erosion control, we see nothing but benefits. We think it important that Maryland should encourage as many property owners as possible to build living shorelines.

Gene Lopez
St. Michaels, MD