

**HB0512\_DNR\_SUP\_EEE\_3-26-24.pdf**

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Position: FAV



Wes Moore, Governor  
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor  
Josh Kurtz, Secretary  
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

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March 26, 2024

**BILL NUMBER: House Bill 512 – Third Reader**

**SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources - Fish and Fisheries - Reporting Requirements**

**DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT**

**EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION**

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The Department supports this legislation. This legislation will give the Department the authority to transition to electronic reporting on a commercial and recreational fishery-wide basis. Since 2012, the Department has piloted programs in coordination with watermen to test electronic reporting through a system called FACTS. Since 2012, the agency continues to add additional electronic reporting pilot programs for various fisheries and at this time believes this method of reporting is effective and should begin to be incorporated fishery wide. This law change would not immediately require commercial fishing operations to use electronic reporting. It would enable DNR to expand the current system beyond the initial pilot programs, establishing them through the regulatory process, which would include multiple opportunities for affected parties to participate in the development of those rules.

DNR started piloting the FACTS electronic reporting system in 2012 for blue crab harvesters, but has since expanded to include finfish harvesters (including striped bass), charter captains, and shellfish harvesters. The software enables commercial fishermen to report their harvest in real-time online or over the phone through a 24-hour call center. This system provides an accountable harvest reporting system that benefits both fisheries managers and the industry. From January - December 2023 there were a total of 35,442 trips reported by FACTS participants.

Accountable harvest reporting enables DNR scientists and fisheries managers to more accurately evaluate fishing patterns to better understand overall fishing effort; an important variable, along with mortality and population, involved in making sustainable fisheries management decisions. This critical information helps the Department to make more timely and informed management decisions based on a more complete picture of harvest data.

Incomplete reports and the absence of information limits the Department’s ability to manage fisheries for maximum sustainable harvest. This ultimately hurts the commercial fishery as agency managers subsequently must err on the side of conservation, when instead there may be instances that warrant additional harvest in a sustainable manner; however, without complete data, fisheries managers are unable to confirm the impacts of that action.

Contact: Dylan Behler, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services  
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The agency is transitioning to a new license system and the ability for the recreational community to report may provide beneficial support to catch information in the future.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

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No similar bills have been proposed previously.

**BILL EXPLANATION**

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The bill as amended would add regulatory authority for the agency related to commercial and recreational reporting.

**HB 512 - CBF - FAV - EEE.pdf**

Uploaded by: Matt Stegman

Position: FAV



# CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

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*Environmental Protection and Restoration  
Environmental Education*

## **House Bill 512**

Natural Resources – Fish and Fisheries – Reporting Requirements

Date: March 26, 2024

To: Education, Energy & the Environment Committee

Position: **Favorable**

From: Allison Colden

MD Executive Director

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Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** House Bill 512 which provides the Department of Natural Resources the flexibility to require harvest reporting for fish and fisheries according to regulations developed by DNR, rather than via paper forms. This commonsense legislation continues recent efforts to modernize and streamline agency processes while providing multiple options for fishery participants to comply with reporting regulations.

Timely and accurate data is critical to the responsible and sustainable management of Maryland's natural resources, particularly its fisheries. Fisheries-dependent data, including harvest reports, dealer buy tickets, and daily trip logs, are a crucial component of fisheries stock assessments at the state level and those conducted by other management bodies, including the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

Currently, many fisheries report via paper forms which are mailed to the Department or turned in at service centers throughout the state. These paper forms must then be entered manually into databases, which can often take months to complete and require close quality control checks to ensure data is entered correctly. Lost or missing paper reports further lengthen the timeline. Paper reporting also limits the management approaches the Department can employ, as in-season changes based on harvest data are not possible, limiting DNR's flexibility and adaptability during the fishing season.

DNR does not have any mandatory requirements for electronic harvest reporting. However, the IT infrastructure for electronic reporting does already exist as voluntary electronic reporting programs that included greater flexibility, higher catch limits or other inducements have been in place for several years. Comments from watermen and charter boat captains at various public meetings have indicated strong support for more flexible reporting approaches from those who have used these systems.

HB 512 would provide DNR the ability to explore options for harvest reporting and provide flexibility to watermen and fishermen who prefer alternatives to paper reporting. It also can provide more accurate and timely data with fewer opportunities for human error and is a critical next step in updating and modernizing Maryland's fisheries management.

**CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 512.**

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at [mstegman@cbf.org](mailto:mstegman@cbf.org).

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# **HB512 - Boyce Testimony (Senate).pdf**

Uploaded by: Regina T. Boyce

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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 26, 2024

Good afternoon Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee.

For the record, I am Vice Chair Regina T. Boyce, presenting on **HB512– Fish and Fisheries – Reporting Requirements**

HB512 is a departmental bill that requires certain persons licensed or regulated by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to submit reports as per regulations set by the Secretary of Natural Resources. This legislation codifies the current practice of electronically reporting harvests by commercial fishermen. Incomplete and absent reports hinder DNR from managing fisheries optimally, impacting federal programs such as CARES and federal disaster determinations, as well as reducing available grant funds for fisheries management.

DNR initiated the FACTS electronic reporting system in 2012 for blue crab harvesters and expanded it to include other groups like finfish harvesters, charter captains, and shellfish harvesters. FACTS offers easy access and real-time harvest information through a mobile web application, aiding both captains and fisheries managers.

HB512 encourages accountable and timely reporting, utilizing the FACTS system's 24/7 availability and call center for improved accountability and random verification of reported activity and harvest.

Commercial fishing operations are not immediately required to adopt electronic reporting under this law. Instead, it provides opportunities for affected parties to participate in its implementation. DNR offers extensive resources, including online training, to assist watermen in understanding the state's electronic harvest reporting system.

Effective reporting enables DNR scientists to analyze fishing patterns for informed management decisions and ensures timely actions by holding the Department accountable.

I thank the Committee for their time and consideration in support of **HB512**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Regina T. Boyce".

Regina T. Boyce