

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 27, 2026

The Honorable Howard Lutnick
Secretary
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Lutnick,

We write to you as the Maryland Congressional Delegation to urge your favorable consideration of the request from Maryland Governor Wes Moore to conduct an evaluation of the Maryland oyster fishery for eligibility for fishery resource disaster assistance as authorized by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, as amended by the Fishery Resource Disasters Improvement Act. Given recent challenges facing the industry – including icy conditions due to the unseasonably cold winter season, recent fishery closures resulting from the Potomac River sewage spill, and overall challenging market conditions – we urge you to declare a fishery disaster and approve fishery resource disaster assistance for the Maryland oyster fishery as soon as possible.

As Congressman Harris pointed out in his letter to NOAA dated February 4, 2026 (attached), Maryland’s commercial oyster fishery is experiencing an economic crisis. Recent commercial landings point to a significant reduction in oyster harvest in the state, while at the same time prices for oysters are dropping.ⁱ As compared with a five-year average of commercial landings, data from January 2026 shows a concerning 44% decline in oyster harvest with continued depressed levels of harvest expected this year, while the dockside value of a bushel of oysters has dropped by 66%.

The Maryland oyster fishery is of economic importance to the state, with millions of dollars of commercial landings every yearⁱⁱ that bolster the Maryland food service and tourism economies, while providing critical income for Maryland watermen. Maryland oysters are also a cornerstone of the rich Chesapeake Bay heritage and are a source of pride for the state, underscoring the importance of the continued operation of the commercial oyster fishery.

Thank you for your urgent attention to this important matter. We stand ready to work with you to support oyster fishery disaster assistance for the Maryland watermen.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



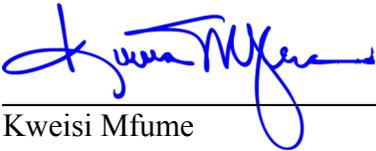
Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator



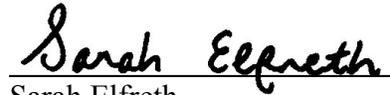
Andy Harris, M.D.
Member of Congress



Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress



Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress



Sarah Elfreth
Member of Congress



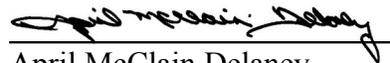
Johnny Oiszewski, Jr.
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



Glenn F. Ivey
Member of Congress



April McClain Delaney
Member of Congress

ⁱ Per the data provided in the Governor's request for an evaluation of the ongoing commercial oyster fishery disaster in Maryland waters.

ⁱⁱ Maryland State Archives. "Maryland at a Glance - Seafood Production."

<https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/01glance/html/seafoodp.html>