November 9, 2016

Secretary Mark Belton
Oyster Advisory Commission - Tawes Building
580 Taylor Ave
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: Preserve Maryland’s sanctuaries and restore the St. Mary’s

Dear Secretary Mark Belton and the Oyster Advisory Commission

I am appalled to hear that you have invited watermen to submit proposals to harvest within Maryland’s sanctuaries. According to the state’s five-year report, most of the sanctuaries are doing well and should continue to remain as sanctuaries. I agree with the report – no harvesting in Maryland’s 52 sanctuaries.

I am particularly invested in the St. Mary’s River. Its sanctuary is thriving thanks to hundreds of community volunteers, schools groups, and homeowners in the Marylanders Grow Oysters program. Since the sanctuary designation in 2010, oyster harvests in the lower river have increased tremendously – mostly due to recruitment from the sanctuary. Any change in the sanctuary would negatively impact overall harvest for the river.

The St. Mary’s River should be designated for major restoration as has happened in Harris Creek. It is ideal for this because it has a huge support network led by the St. Mary’s River Watershed Association, it has excellent recruitment year after year, water quality and salinity are ideal, and the oysters there are living longer and may be developing disease resistance. Moreover, many dollars have already been spent developing baseline water quality data and restoring oyster habitat. Why throw that all away for a few watermen to pocket a few extra dollars?

Yours truly,