

**NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF**

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NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**LEGISLATIVE HEARING
ON
H.R. 5694 Alaska's Right to Ivory Sales and Tradition (ARTIST) Act and H.R. 6893
Chesapeake Bay Watershed Advancement for Training, Education, Restoration, and
Science (WATERS) Act**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, WILDLIFE, AND FISHERIES
HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

MARCH 26, 2026

Introduction

Chairwoman Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on H.R. 5694, the Alaska's Right to Ivory Sales and Tradition (ARTIST) Act and H.R. 6893, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Advancement for Training, Education, Restoration, and Science (WATERS) Act, to reauthorize the Chesapeake Bay Office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. My name is Dr. Timothy Petty and I am the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and Deputy Administrator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

NOAA acknowledges and appreciates the ongoing work with this Subcommittee. I look forward to discussing the bills under consideration with you today.

H.R. 5694 ARTIST Act

The Artist Act would recognize the existing authority granted to Alaska Natives to create authentic Alaska Native articles of handicrafts and clothing from marine mammal parts under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). The Artist Act also makes it explicit that Alaska Natives may possess marine mammal ivory and sell handicrafts/clothing outside of Alaska for economic opportunity under the MMPA handicraft provision. The Artist Act emphasizes consideration of Indigenous Knowledge in depleted marine mammal stock determinations and in regulations regarding take of depleted stocks. The Artist Act does not authorize the additional taking of marine mammals under the MMPA.

If this bill were to become law, it would revise Section 101(b) of the MMPA. Section 101(b) of the MMPA creates an exemption to the MMPA's take prohibition for any Indian, Aleut, or Eskimo who resides in Alaska and who dwells on the coast of the North Pacific Ocean or the Arctic Ocean under certain circumstances. Namely, Section 101(b) allows such persons to take marine mammals for subsistence purposes or to create and sell authentic Native articles of handicrafts and clothing, provided they do so in a non-wasteful manner (16 U.S.C. § 1371(b)). This bill would change the text of Section 101(b) of the MMPA in ways that may lead to differences in how Section 101(b) is implemented.

H.R. 6893 Chesapeake Bay WATERS Act

The NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office is a division of the Office of Habitat Conservation within the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service.

The NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office is a Federal partner in the Chesapeake Bay Program. In 2025, Federal and state partners committed to a revised Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, which includes four goals that are designed to achieve clean water, thriving habitat, and healthy and productive fisheries across the region. This Agreement guides the work of the Chesapeake Bay Program.

The NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office works with state, Federal, and local partners to restore oysters in the Chesapeake Bay. NOAA was instrumental in achieving the restoration of 10 Bay tributaries by 2025. Oysters are an important part of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem, and healthy oyster reefs improve opportunities for commercial and recreational fishing.

The NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office maintains the Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System. This asset collects real-time data that is used by boaters, anglers, and other outdoor enthusiasts who use its data to plan a safer day on the water.

The NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office work enhances local seafood production by conducting and funding fisheries research that provides new data and information to Federal and state fishery managers. We are also the lead Federal agency for sustainable fisheries in the Chesapeake Bay Program, coordinating the partnership's work in oyster restoration, blue crab management, and improving fish habitat.

The FY26 President's Budget proposed terminating funding for this Office in order to support higher priority NOAA activities. However, the Budget maintained funding for the EPA Chesapeake Bay geographic program. The program manages the Bay's Total Maximum Daily Load and provides a range of assistance to states, local governments, NGOs, and academic institutions.

Conclusion

We appreciate the Subcommittee's support. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.