

Date:

**Re: HD 2926: AN ACT TO END THE TAKING OF HORSESHOE CRABS FOR BAIT**

**Dear [Recipient's Name],**

In the wake of November's national election, it is more critical than ever for Massachusetts to reaffirm its leadership in environmental stewardship. Your support for **House Docket No. 2926, An Act to End the Taking of Horseshoe Crabs for Bait**, would be a significant step toward protecting a critical species and the ecosystems that depend on them.

As a constituent and [Your Affiliation - e.g., concerned citizen, marine scientist, etc.], I strongly urge your support for HD 2926.

Horseshoe crabs play an essential role in medical science, as their blue blood is indispensable for endotoxin testing, which ensures the safety of medical products and vaccines. Unfortunately, these ecologically and scientifically invaluable creatures are harvested for use as bait in whelk and eel fisheries. This practice is unnecessary and unsustainable, especially given the availability of alternative bait sources such as the invasive green crab, which are abundant in our waters and negatively impacting the shellfish industry.

The stage is set. After decades of ineffective regulations to increase horseshoe crab populations, a consortium of environmental groups in 2024 pushed for stronger protections for spawning crabs. This action prompted the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries to implement a partial ban on harvesting during spawning season, representing a small step toward horseshoe crab recovery.

Nevertheless, the fishing industry is still allowed to take 140,000 horseshoe crabs each year for use as bait. Female horseshoe crabs can lay up to 80,000 eggs, so continuing the bait take dramatically limits the ability of this species to replenish its population.

Though insufficient to assure recovery of horseshoe crab populations, the recent regulatory changes do acknowledge that this ancient creature is critical to human health and the entire Atlantic coastal ecosystem.

Horseshoe crabs are at the center of a complex food web that stretches from Maine to Florida—and even further. The red knot, for example, listed as threatened under the U.S. and Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, migrates from South America to its nesting grounds in the Arctic and back again, fueled in large part by horseshoe crab eggs—once found in abundance on our beaches.

The 'center' is not holding. Continuing loss of habitat, and exploitation by the bait and biomedical industries, have severely depleted horseshoe crab populations in Massachusetts, leading to near functional extinction. This decline has significant consequences for the entire ecosystem, including many commercially important fish and shellfish species.

Ending the 'bait take' will give horseshoe crabs and the species that depend on them for food, a real opportunity to recover.

Take note, the tide is also changing for horseshoe crab use by the pharmaceutical industry. Big pharma no longer can claim to be dependent on the use the unique blue blood of horseshoe crabs for drug testing. The U.S. Pharmacopeia has approved a new rule that allows US-based biomedical companies to utilize two synthetic alternatives for detecting toxins in

injectable medicines and implants. Many leading pharmaceutical companies have already moved to replace horseshoe crab blood in their operations.

The story of the American bison is similar. Once thought to be resistant to extinction by their sheer numbers, it took only a few decades for bison to disappear from our landscape. Once so plentiful on our beaches that harbormasters paid a bounty of 3-cents apiece for their removal, now the appearance of even one crab on those same beaches creates an Instagram sensation.

Other states have taken decisive action to protect horseshoe crabs:

- **Delaware Bay Region:** maintains a 10-year ban on harvesting female horseshoe crabs.
- **New Jersey:** Imposed a moratorium on the possession of horseshoe crabs and their eggs.
- **Maine:** It is unlawful to take, kill or possess or injure horseshoe crabs or eggs between May 1 and October 30.
- **New York:** The Legislature passed the Horseshoe Crab Protection Act in 2024: "No person shall take horseshoe crabs, including for commercial or biomedical purposes, from the waters of this state." Governor Hochul declined to sign it. Advocates are preparing to resubmit the bill in 2025.
- **South Carolina:** Prohibits the take of horseshoed crabs for bait. Regulation supported by Charles River Laboratories, formerly based in South Carolina, now operating on Cape Cod. \*
- **Connecticut:** Banned the hand harvest of Horseshoe Crabs in 2023 through Public Act 23-6.

Connecticut Governor Lamont when signing his state's legislation stated: "This law says that we need to take a break and let this species regenerate and get back to a state of good health. I strongly urge our neighboring states to join this growing coalition and enact similar laws to protect the population in their waters."

By supporting HD 2926, Massachusetts can join this growing coalition of states committed to safeguarding the horseshoe crab and the ecosystems it supports. This legislation is a critical step toward ensuring the recovery of horseshoe crab populations, preserving biodiversity, and fostering sustainable fishing practices.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue. I urge you to lend your full support to this essential piece of legislation and consider signing on as a co-sponsor with Representative Michelle Badger, 1st Plymouth District.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Contact Information]

## Appendix

### \* CHARLES RIVER LAB SUPPORTS THE BAN ON THE USE OF HORSESHOE CRABS AS BAIT

Working with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, we [Charles River Laboratories] have supported legislation to manage and regulate horseshoe crab fisheries and prohibit the use of horseshoe crabs as bait for the eel and whelk industries. Since these regulations have been in place, the horseshoe crab population in South Carolina has flourished...Our conservation efforts, legislative support, and educational campaigns have not only helped the population of horseshoe crabs in South Carolina and along the east coast, but they've also contributed to a healthy ecosystem for other wildlife (<https://hsc.criver.com/south-carolina.html>).

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### HD 2926: AN ACT TO END THE TAKING OF HORSESHOE CRABS FOR BAIT

No person shall engage in the harvesting of horseshoe crabs (*Limulus polyphemus*) or the eggs of horseshoe crabs from the waters of the Commonwealth for use as bait.

The Director of the Division of Marine Fisheries may authorize the taking of horseshoe crabs by permit for educational or scientific purposes provided the director determines that such harvesting will not cause harm to the horseshoe crab population in the Commonwealth.

The taking of horseshoe crabs incidentally during legal fishing operations does not violate this section if the crabs are returned immediately to the water unharmed.

Any person who violates the provisions of this section shall be fined twenty-five dollars for each specimen taken.

No penalty shall result in possessing a cast off or molted shell (exoskeleton) of a horseshoe crab.

The Division of Marine Fisheries shall enforce the provisions of this section.