

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 23, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write to express our significant concerns with the influx of crabmeat from Venezuela, which has threatened the viability of local fisheries across the Chesapeake Bay. Domestic seafood producers in Maryland and Virginia have experienced significant strain due to the influx of imported Venezuelan crabmeat, some of which is mislabeled and contaminated.^{1,2} In 2018, Venezuelan crabmeat mislabeled as originating from Maryland caused an outbreak of foodborne illnesses, resulting in multiple hospitalizations.³ Since then, the supply of imported crabmeat has increased, threatening the future livelihood of domestic industry and creating the conditions for a 62 percent decrease in the domestic supply. This has harmed crab fishing industries throughout the Chesapeake Bay, which produces 50 percent of the United States' total blue crab harvest, a proportion that is now diminishing year over year. There are now fewer than 20 Maryland crab picking and seafood processing companies, down from 53 in 1995.

Chesapeake Bay crab fisheries and processors follow a strict set of regulations to ensure that the Bay remains one of the most sustainable crab fisheries in the world, that the blue crabs harvested there are of the highest quality, and that the industry does no harm to other species. Foreign competitors often confront little or no such regulation. Not only does this imbalance put local fisheries and seafood businesses at a steep disadvantage, it can also put consumers at increased risk. Consumers are often misled about what they are eating, and sometimes even made sick, as was the case when imported Venezuelan crabmeat was linked with multiple cases of *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* infections.

We urge your Administration to use all of the tools at its disposal to remedy this unsustainable situation. Specifically, we urge you to:

¹ Chesapeake Bay Magazine. "Crabeat Emptor." Chesapeake Bay Magazine, 29 July 2020, www.chesapeakebaymagazine.com/crabeat-emptor/.

² "State Urges Marylanders Not To Consume Fresh Crab Meat Imported From Venezuela" *Maryland Department of Health Newsroom* 6 July 2018, health.maryland.gov/newsroom/Pages/State-Urges-Marylanders-Not-To-Consume-Fresh-Crab-Meat-Imported-From-Venezuela.aspx.

³ Seelman, S. L., Whitney, B. M., Stokes, E. K., Elliot, E. L., Griswold, T., Patel, K., Bloodgood, S., Jones, J. L., Cripe, J., Cornell, J., Luo, Y., Williams, D. L., Boyle, M. M., Cahoon, J., Brennan, C., Wildey, L. M., Grover, V. M., Simonson, S., Crosby, A. J., Bazaco, M. C., ... Viazis, S. (2023). An Outbreak Investigation of *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* Infections in the United States Linked to Crabmeat Imported from Venezuela: 2018. *Foodborne pathogens and disease*, 20(4), 123–131. <https://doi.org/10.1089/fpd.2022.0078>

- 1) Direct the United States International Trade Commission to conduct an investigation, per Section 201 of the Trade Act of 1974, looking into the harm caused by Venezuelan crabmeat imports and recommending remedies.
- 2) Use the full array of informal actions available to you to address this trade issue, including through negotiations, utilization of World Trade Organization Committees, bilateral dialogues, and other activities.

The Chesapeake Bay crab industry has faced numerous challenges, and the region has worked hard to preserve the blue crab population over the years. This industry carries unique cultural importance for the broader Mid-Atlantic region, enriching and enhancing the regional culinary landscape. Without the federal government stepping in to protect American manufacturers from unfair competition, they might not make it through this crisis. If they do not, Maryland, Virginia, and the country, will be all the poorer for it.

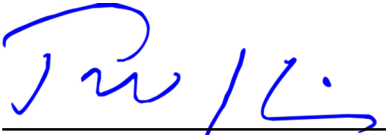
Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Andy Harris, M.D.
Member of Congress



Robert J. Wittman
Member of Congress



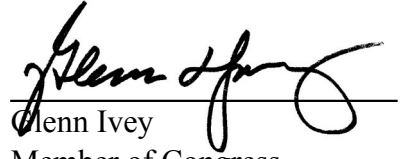
C. A. Dutch Ruppertsberger
Member of Congress



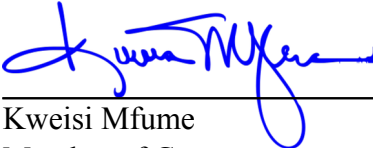
John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress



David J. Trone
Member of Congress



Glenn Ivey
Member of Congress



Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress