

Date: January 15, 2021

Bill: House Bill 391, Solid Waste-Management- Prohibition on Releasing a Balloon Into the Atmosphere

Position: Support

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Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for **House Bill 391, Solid Waste-Management- Prohibition on Releasing a Balloon Into the Atmosphere**, which will reduce the harmful impact plastic balloons can have when released into the environment while increasing public awareness of plastic pollution.

An estimated 15 million metric tons of plastic enters the ocean each year; that is the equivalent to about two dump trucks full of plastic entering the ocean every minute.<sup>1</sup> If current practices continue, by 2050 plastic in the ocean is likely to outweigh the biomass of all fish. Once in the environment, plastic debris breaks down into smaller pieces, but never completely disappears. Balloons are a significant contributor to this plastic pollution, which is hazardous to habitats and wildlife, as animals may confuse plastic pieces for food.

In 2004, the National Aquarium was proud to support a similar bill in the General Assembly named the “Inky bill,” after a pygmy sperm whale that was found critically ill on a New Jersey beach. The U.S. Coast Guard transported the young whale to a hospital pool at the National Aquarium where our medical team was able to extract foreign material lodged in her stomach- including mylar balloons and other various types of plastic.



Caption: Balloons collected from Maryland beaches.

A recent report by Oceana compiled data from 51 organizations, including the National Aquarium, and found nearly 1,800 cases of documented plastic consumption or entanglement in sea turtles and marine mammals, mostly from 2009 to 2018.<sup>2</sup> Of these cases, 90% of them involved animals swallowing plastic. Ingested plastic can obstruct an animal’s digestion or lacerate intestines, interfering with their ability to survive.

Once released, balloons can stay in the air for up to two weeks, traveling hundreds of miles. Balloons are easily caught in ocean currents that take them far beyond the Chesapeake Bay. To this day, released balloons have been recovered as far as 45 miles off the coast of Maryland.

By passing HB 391, Maryland will reduce the amount of harmful plastic pollution entering waterways and littering communities, while protecting the health of the people and marine animals living there. **We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 391.**

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<sup>1</sup> Forrest A, Giacobazzi L, Dunlop S, et al. (2019). Eliminating Plastic Pollution: How a Voluntary Contribution From Industry Will Drive the Circular Plastics Economy. *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 6:627.

<sup>2</sup> Warner K, Linske E, Mustain P, et al. (November 2020). Choked, Strangled, Drowned: The Plastics Crisis Unfolding In Our Oceans. Zenodo. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4281302>