



NATIONAL AQUARIUM®

Date: March 6, 2024

Bill: SB 1081 Education - Public Schools - Driver Education and Transportation to Field Trips

Position: Support

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for **Senate Bill 1081 - Education - Public Schools - Driver Education and Transportation to Field Trips**, which will create a State-Aided Institutions Field Trip Fund to provide schools transportation funding for field trips to State-aided educational institutions, like the National Aquarium.

For over 40 years, the National Aquarium has welcomed tens of thousands of students from every jurisdiction in Maryland annually for school field trips. Over the last five years, the Aquarium's Maryland School Field Trip Program has welcomed 250,000 participants, nearly all free of charge. The State-Aided Educational Institutions (SAI) grant, administered by the Maryland State Department of Education, supports approximately 40% of the National Aquarium's cost to administer our field trip program, and the Aquarium underwrites all the remaining costs associated with continuing to admit Maryland students for free.

Unfortunately, transportation to the National Aquarium is one of the most significant barriers schools face to participating in field trips. Whether visiting from a local neighborhood in Baltimore City, or traveling from Garrett or Somerset Counties, transportation is a seemingly universal challenge. State policy dictates that SAI funding "may not be used for transportation of students". Therefore, despite many schools being able to attend the National Aquarium free of charge, transportation costs can make the field trip unaffordable.

The National Aquarium appreciates the idea of a grant program to help offset transportation costs for schools trying to visit several of our state's high quality educational institutions. Maryland students will benefit from having greater access to these organizations. We particularly appreciate that funding will be prioritized to schools who need it the most and that it may be provided prospectively, and not only as a reimbursement of expenses incurred, because the upfront costs may be a barrier for some schools.

We appreciate the Committee's consideration of this legislation. **We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 1081.**

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