



Date: March 5, 2024

Bill: SB 969 – Stream and Watershed Restoration - Whole Watershed Act

Position: Support

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Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for **Senate Bill 969 - Stream and Watershed Restoration - Stream Restoration Contractor Licensing and Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Restoration and Funding (Whole Watershed Act)**, which will identify priority watersheds and focus restoration investments in those areas to improve effectiveness and ecological impact.

One of the National Aquarium's three overarching conservation goals is to save wildlife and habitats. We work with communities and partners on restoration efforts in several areas around the state and throughout our Chesapeake Bay watershed. Although there has been important progress in Maryland and around the watershed, collectively we are not on track to meet our water quality goals.

The Whole Watershed Act is a timely policy response to key findings and recommendations from the multi-year Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response (CESR) report from the Chesapeake Bay Program Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee<sup>1</sup>, which points to the need for new strategies and resource allocations to effectively improve the health of the Bay in the face of ongoing challenges, including population growth, changes in land use, and climate change. CESR also makes clear that restoration efforts to improve water quality can achieve more co-benefits for wildlife and people.

This bill will coordinate work and investment in restoration efforts under the guidance of a State Management Team that brings together stakeholders and permitting entities with prioritization of environmental justice communities. The approach can be adapted for the unique needs of rural, suburban, and urban watersheds, and we encourage its implementation to account for and build upon existing community restoration efforts in the selected watersheds.

We believe that the legislation will enhance watershed restoration, increase stakeholder involvement and lead to healthier and more resilient watersheds for people and wildlife.

**We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 969.**

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<sup>1</sup> Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) 2023. Achieving water quality goals in the Chesapeake Bay: A comprehensive evaluation of system response (K. Stephenson & D. Wardrop, Eds.). STAC Publication Number 23-006. Available: <https://www.chesapeake.org/stac/cesr/>