



Date: February 28, 2024

Bill: HB 1129 – Wildlife – Protections and Highway Crossings

Position: Support

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for **House Bill 1179 – Wildlife – Protections and Highway Crossings**, which will encourage agency coordination to reduce road impacts on threatened and endangered species and reduce wildlife-vehicle collision risks for motorists.

Saving wildlife and habitats is one of the National Aquarium’s three overarching conservation goals. Increasing habitat connectivity is one key solution to address the ongoing biodiversity crisis, especially when policies include special consideration for threatened and endangered species as this bill does. Roads fragment landscapes, creating barriers to many animals’ ability to feed and reproduce, and many species including reptiles and amphibians face the risk of mortality from road crossings during their overland migrations. Examples include wood turtles, semi-aquatic rainbow snakes, and the Eastern tiger salamander which migrates from woodlands in early spring and often travels over roads to reach breeding ponds. This bill will ultimately assist species conservation efforts with improved infrastructure that helps wildlife while reducing dangerous and costly wildlife-vehicle collisions.

This legislation also establishes a Highway Crossing Fund to invest in wildlife crossing infrastructure along with research needed to help determine the best siting of crossing locations. Such a fund will also allow the state to maximize investments in wildlife connectivity; this bill is particularly timely considering significant new federal funding available for wildlife crossings for projects that require non-federal matching amounts. Maryland should join the many other states that have enacted recent legislation encouraging infrastructure that allows safer movement of wildlife.

Properly-sited wildlife crossings significantly reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and related driver injuries and vehicle damage costs, while improving habitat connectivity which contributes to better conservation of biodiversity. **We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 1129.**

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