



Date: February 20, 2025

Bill: HB 1016 - Economic Development - Baltimore Convention and Tourism Redevelopment and Operating Authority - Established

Position: Support

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report on **HB 1016**, which would establish the Baltimore Convention and Tourism Redevelopment Operating Authority to govern the renovation, revitalization, and ongoing maintenance and operations of the Baltimore Convention Center site and the marketing of Baltimore City as a tourist destination. The legislation adopts recommendations by the Baltimore Convention and Tourism Redevelopment and Operating Authority Task Force. If passed, the bill would effectively merge the Baltimore Convention Center and Visit Baltimore to improve long term planning and stability.

Annually, the National Aquarium generates \$430 million in economic activity, \$36 million in state/local tax revenue, and supports 3,400 jobs statewide. The impact of the National Aquarium is supported by and tied to the success of the Baltimore Convention Center and Visit Baltimore. The National Aquarium welcomes 1.2 million visitors each year and we partner with Visit Baltimore to attract more tourism to the city. We also offer promotional rates to Convention Center attendees, and we benefit from conventions utilizing the National Aquarium for special events. A thriving Baltimore Convention Center and Visit Baltimore benefits the National Aquarium and the entire downtown community.

Like other attractions along the Inner Harbor, the Baltimore Convention Center is faced with millions of dollars in deferred maintenance and infrastructure needs. The proposed Operating Authority will be tasked with carrying out renovations and recommending necessary funding streams to ensure the Baltimore Convention Center can compete for and meet the needs of modern conventions. The Operating Authority will be comprised of the appropriate expertise and authority to meaningfully address these long-term infrastructure needs.

Including the governance of Visit Baltimore under the Operating Authority aligns with best practices seen in other jurisdictions. The combined governance model will allow for easier communication, effective planning, operational efficiencies, and alleviate administrative burdens.

The future of downtown Baltimore is crucial to the state's economy. As the city, state, and private sector invest in the revitalization of downtown, anchor institutions like the Baltimore Convention Center will continue to play a key role in driving success and economic growth. **We urge the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 1016.**

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