

Date: January 29, 2020

Bill: House Bill 13, 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 13, 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 8 million metric tons of plastic enters the ocean each year; that is equivalent to at least one dump truck full of plastic entering the ocean every minute. If current practices continue, plastic in the ocean could outweigh fish by 2050. Once in the environment, plastic debris breaks down into smaller pieces, but they never completely disappear. This plastic debris, including balloons, is a hazard for wildlife and habitats, 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.

Once released, balloons can stay in the air for up to two weeks, traveling hundreds of miles, and 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 13, Maryland will reduce the amount of harmful plastic 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 13.

Contact:

Ryan Fredriksson

Director, Government Affairs

410-385-8276

[rfredriksson@aqua.org](mailto:rfredriksson@aqua.org)