



Date: February 8, 2022

Bill: HB 443 Maryland Corps Program - Revisions

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair McIntosh and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for **HB 443 Maryland Corps Program – Revisions**, which will remove inequitable barriers to entry facing potential participants, while creating new pathways for service and more effective public-private partnerships. Specifically, the bill would expand the Chesapeake Conservation Corps, a vital program which increases access to career opportunities around protecting and restoring ecosystem and community health throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed by placing participants with nonprofit or government agencies for a yearlong term of service.

The National Aquarium has been a proud host organization with the Chesapeake Conservation Corps (CCC) since 2011, hosting ten CCC participants to date. Each participant has made significant contributions to the Aquarium’s mission to inspire conservation, with impact across a variety of projects including hands-on field restoration throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed, citizen science events, water quality and urban biodiversity studies, plastic/trash debris cleanup, and ongoing engagement with community members throughout Baltimore.

The Aquarium recognizes the value of a yearlong service position and offers unique, hands-on training for CCC participants to build their knowledge base and experience to advance their careers. Since becoming a CCC host organization, the National Aquarium has extended offers of full-time employment to six of the ten CCC participants, ultimately hiring five CCC alumni as staff after their term. As noted by one of our CCC participants who was on staff at the Aquarium for six years following their service year:

“My year in the [Chesapeake Conservation] Corps was a continual learning experience, and I am very grateful for all of the knowledge and professional development I gained throughout my term.” - National Aquarium CCC Participant

The Chesapeake Conservation Corps also promotes connection and collaboration among host organizations and agencies, decreasing administrative burden for host entities while leveraging perpetually limited staff capacity and other resources towards greater impact. Our CCC participants have interfaced with others in their cohort as well as staff at other nonprofit organizations and state and federal agencies that the National Aquarium works with. This bill would enhance such networks. Furthermore, additional funding could allow the Aquarium to offer additional CCC service slots by decreasing the cost burden on host organizations.

The National Aquarium supports this legislation because it helps to remove barriers to entry for participation in service programs, establishes sustainable funding mechanisms to better support host organizations, and expands service opportunities throughout the state. We look forward to the growth of the Chesapeake Conservation Corps program if this bill is passed. **We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 443.**

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