

Date: February 17, 2023

Bill: HB 503 – Natural Resources - Greenspace Equity Program - Establishment

Position: Favorable with Amendments

Dear Chair Barve and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium strongly supports the creation of a greenspace equity grant program. Currently, there are no targeted funding mechanisms that support the stewardship of vital greenspaces that benefit overburdened or underserved communities. However, the bill as written may limit access by such communities to existing greenspaces. **The National Aquarium respectfully requests an amendment to House Bill 503, Greenspace Equity Program.**

We recommend adding language to the bill to ensure the Masonville Cove Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership in South Baltimore and other locations like it are eligible for funding.



The Masonville Cove Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership is a synergistic collaboration between the Maryland Port Administration (who also own the property), Living Classrooms Foundation, National Aquarium, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Together, these partners ensure nearby underserved and overburdened communities have access to 70 acres of water, 52 acres of restored wetlands, three miles of walking trails, a LEED rated education center, and a fishing pier. In 2013, Masonville Cove was designated as the nation’s first urban wildlife refuge partnership by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The mission of the Masonville Cove Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership is to inspire all people to explore, discover and respect nature, growing the next generation of environmental stewards. Since its inception in 2009, Masonville Cove partners have engaged thousands of community members, students, and volunteers through year-round programming and events such as monthly educational programs (i.e. First Thursdays), Latino Conservation Day, Project Clean Stream, Nature for Kids, Urban Wildlife Conservation Day, and more. Masonville Cove is also home to Baltimore City’s only known pair of nesting bald eagles, which have returned again in 2023.

Masonville Cove is an ideal community greenspace deserving of support through this program. Masonville Cove is adjacent to and supports engagement of multiple overburdened and underserved communities, but because it is in a census tract without residential households to determine environmental health or socioeconomic indicators, the census tract is not considered overburdened or underserved. Furthermore, the nonprofit partners do not own the property and it is unclear whether they meet the requirement that the property be “managed by an eligible applicant” (page 7, line 2). Therefore, additional language is needed to ensure Masonville Cove is eligible for the greenspace equity grant program.

We suggest an amendment (see below) to allow eligible applicants who hold a conservation easement on a property to apply. In April 2022, the Board of Public Works approved the Masonville Cove Conservation Easement between the Maryland Port Administration, Maryland Environmental Trust and Baltimore Green Space. This amendment would set clear standards that will allow Masonville Cove

partners to apply for funding, rather than leaving the fate of Masonville Cove's eligibility up to how the state interprets the term "managed by".

Thank you for your work on this important issue. **We urge the Committee to adopt one of our proposed amendments to HB 503 and issue a favorable report.**

Contact:

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Proposed Amendment:

page 6, line 23 through page 7 line 5

Option 1

(E) (1) (I) BEGINNING IN FISCAL YEAR 2025, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL MAKE GRANTS TO ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS FOR GREENSPACE EQUITY PROJECTS LOCATED:

1. IN AN OVERBURDENED COMMUNITY;

2. IN AN UNDERSERVED COMMUNITY; OR

3. ON A PROPERTY THAT IS ADJACENT TO AND SERVES AN OVERBURDENED COMMUNITY OR AN UNDERSERVED COMMUNITY AND

A. IS OWNED OR MANAGED BY AN ELIGIBLE APPLICANT; OR

B. AN ELIGIBLE APPLICANT HOLDS A CONSERVATION EASEMENT.