



NATIONAL AQUARIUM®

Date: February 22, 2024

Bill: House Bill 228 – Natural Resources – Maryland State Parks – Funds and Plan Alterations

Position: Support

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for **Senate Bill 259 – Natural Resources – Maryland State Parks – Funds and Plan Alterations** which, among other things, allows the Great Maryland Outdoors Fund to support outdoor environmental education opportunities in the state.

The mission of the National Aquarium is to connect people with nature to inspire compassion and care for our ocean planet. The Aquarium engages more than 100,000 students annually and works with families, schools, and communities to build skills in science, technology, engineering, the arts, and math (STEAM) across a wide range of education programs. Numerous research studies find that time spent playing and learning in nature promotes health and wellness and increases student achievement. The Aquarium incorporates outdoor environmental education into many of our education programs, including a summer camp program that provides Baltimore City students hands-on experiences in different aquatic habitats throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed and beyond. The National Aquarium strongly supports additional resources to promote and grow outdoor environmental education in Maryland.

We also appreciate that this bill adds to earlier legislative efforts in recent years that increased state park staffing, addressed maintenance backlogs, and improved access to water recreation and amenities – all important and needed investment that will help to enable greater access to nature. Our state can and must build on existing conservation measures so that we can ensure all Marylanders are able to enjoy and benefit from nature with access to quality environmental education.

We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 228.

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