



Date: February 19, 2025

Bill: HB 878 – Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2025

Position: Support

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for **HB 878**. The legislation would define vernal pools as confined depressions with seasonal water presence that provide habitat for certain amphibians and invertebrates; and require the Department of the Environment to adopt regulations to protect and preserve vernal pools.

Vernal pools are isolated seasonal bodies of water that form during the wetter months of each year and play critical roles in the health of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. For one, they serve as necessary habitats that support an incredible variety of life. Biologists have identified more than 700 species that depend on vernal pools as habitat in northeastern region of the US – including wood frogs, American toads, spotted salamanders, Eastern fairy shrimp and the state-endangered tiger salamanders. The still water and fallen leaves along with an abundance of invertebrate prey and an absence of fish predators make vernal pools ideal breeding grounds for these and other amphibians, many of which cannot breed anywhere else.

Vernal pools are also an incredibly important part of our hydrological system, serving as natural stormwater runoff ponds that capture and filter stormwater and replenish groundwater. Nature provides these important ecosystem services for free, and particularly during challenging budget realities, it would behoove the state to identify and conserve seasonal wetlands that help supply people with clean water.

One of the National Aquarium’s overarching conservation goals is to save wildlife and habitats, and we recognize that the ephemeral features that make vernal pools important ecosystems are the same reasons they are vulnerable to human disturbance. They do not qualify for current wetland regulations in Maryland, and following a 2023 U.S. Supreme Court decision, vernal pools and other seasonal wetlands effectively lost Clean Water Act protections.

We appreciate that the Department of the Environment and Department of Natural Resources have developed a consensus definition of vernal pools that is incorporated into this bill. Now is the time to build on that work to further improve wetland science and conservation and protect vernal pools. **We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 878.**

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