



Date: April 2, 2026

Bill: SB 523 – Department of Natural Resources – Water Resources – Identification of Vernal Pools

Position: Support with amendment

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Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully urges a favorable report for **SB 523** with incorporation of sponsor amendment to rename the legislation in honor of Jack Cover who passed away this year after 37 years of dedicated service to the National Aquarium and our mission to connect people with nature to inspire conservation.

I am one of countless staff and guests who learned from Jack about vernal pools and many other habitats and species. The wealth of knowledge he shared included the amphibians and hundreds of other species that depend on vernal pool habitats; the ecosystem services vernal pools provide to people; and the critical importance vernal pools contribute to the health of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Jack leaves a legacy of helping others understand the important roles wildlife, habitats and people play in their ecosystems.

A better understanding of Maryland's vernal pools is needed to calculate specific values, yet on the global scale we know that of all terrestrial ecosystems, wetlands provide the highest value per area of ecological services<sup>1</sup>. Meanwhile about two-thirds of all U.S. wetlands, including vernal pools, lost Clean Water Act protections administered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) following the 2023 *Sackett v. EPA* Supreme Court decision. EPA's recent proposal to further narrow the scope of wetlands and other water bodies protected by the Clean Water Act emphasizes the need for Maryland to act now to ensure an improved understanding of our vernal pool ecosystems.

The Aquarium appreciates efforts by the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Environment, Delegate Hill, Senator Washington and many others to better understand and characterize vernal pools. This legislation builds on that work and would improve identification and documentation of vernal pools throughout our state. Renaming the legislation would be a meaningful acknowledgement of Jack's legacy to increase understanding of our watershed and the importance of vernal pools. **We urge the Committee to rename the bill in honor of Jack Cover and issue a favorable report on SB 523.**

Contact:

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<sup>1</sup> Costanza, R., et al. 1997. The value of the world's ecosystem services and natural capital. *NATURE*, 387. [https://www.robertcostanza.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/1997\\_J\\_Costanza\\_Nature.pdf](https://www.robertcostanza.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/1997_J_Costanza_Nature.pdf)