NATIONAL AQUARIUM®

Date: February 25, 2026

Bill: HB 796 - Recycling - Prohibition on the Chemical Conversion of Plastic

Position: Support

Chair Korman and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for HB 796 - Recycling - Prohibition on the Chemical Conversion of Plastic. This legislation would ensure that Maryland's definition of recycling does not include chemical conversion of plastics and would prohibit construction of facilities that convert plastic to fuel or feedstock.

Stopping plastic pollution is one of the National Aquarium's three strategic conservation goals. As part of our commitment to addressing this crisis, the National Aquarium has taken several steps to reduce or eliminate the use of plastic in our facilities, including the elimination of single-use plastics from our cafeterias. Most plastic is made from fossil fuels, and every stage of the plastic use cycle contributes to climate change, air pollution and environmental justice concerns. Over time, large plastics degrade into smaller and even microscopic pieces that endanger wildlife, contaminate the global food web, and transport toxins harmful to human health. In recent years, global plastic production has outpaced any other manufactured material, leading to a rapidly accelerating pollution crisis.

Chemical conversion of plastic, often called "advanced" or "molecular" 'recycling,' is misleading terminology that applies to several nascent or unproven technologies that do nothing to slow the stream of plastics entering our environment. Chemical conversion of plastic in the U.S. usually means pyrolysis, a type of incineration of plastic mostly to fuel, not recycled plastic. This and other chemical plastic conversion processes also generate hazardous and toxic waste, may rely on fossil fuels that drive climate change, and cannot be scaled in a timely or cost-effective manner. Calling chemical plastic conversion processes 'recycling' is likely to lull consumers into a false sense of comfort that using plastics will have fewer harmful consequences for their health or environment. Waste management practices are unable to keep up with the volume of plastic we currently produce. Unfortunately, chemical conversion of plastic offers more problems than solutions and will only grow the burdens of our current waste management inadequacies for municipalities, taxpayers, and the planet.

There are several proven policy solutions that can help Maryland address plastic pollution, including those that prioritize plastic reduction and reuse, set minimum recycled content standards, incentivize producer responsibility, address deficiencies in existing recycling infrastructure, support education and waste reduction, and other measures being considered by this committee. Instead of addressing the root causes of the plastic pollution crisis, chemical conversion of plastic threatens to keep us further entrenched in them. Addressing the harmful impacts of the plastic pollution crisis requires comprehensive, proven, and systemic change. Chemical 'recycling' cannot – and should not – be part of those changes in Maryland. **We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 796.**

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