



**Filed Testimony of
J. Kirby Fowler, Jr., President & CEO
The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore
March 9, 2021**

**Senate Budget and Taxation Capital Budget Subcommittee
House Appropriations Capital Budget Subcommittee
Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Hearing**

Chairman Peters and Chairman Barnes and Members of the Subcommittees:

The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore is grateful for this opportunity to appear before you to discuss the Fiscal Year 2022 capital budget request of \$4,750,000 for a variety of projects that are necessary for the Zoo's basic infrastructure improvements, correcting life-safety and animal welfare deficiencies, repairing and upgrading life support systems in two exhibits, and renovating both the interior and exterior of the Chimpanzee Forest exhibit.

This first capital budget of my tenure as President and CEO of The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore takes into consideration that our regulatory agency, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), is still conducting inspections. The Fiscal Year 2022 requests are predominantly infrastructure improvements. As was true last fiscal year, it is time to have a specific focus on the kinds of things that must be done to not only keep the facility in good working order but also to avoid past mistakes. While these capital projects are not primarily guest amenities, they are critical to both good animal husbandry and proper care of this 145-year-old facility. Renewal of the Zoo's facilities is an ongoing and necessary process in order to continue to meet USDA requirements and Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) standards. Failure to meet USDA requirements could result in fines and/or immediate closure of the facility. AZA accreditation is a lease mandate. AZA accreditation requires meeting all USDA standards.

Last year, due to COVID-19, AZA extended all accreditations for one year. Because it routinely takes 18 months to complete the process of renovation, it is paramount that the Zoo begin the work in fiscal year 2022 to be ready for AZA accreditation in 2023. The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore and the National Aquarium in Baltimore are scheduled to co-host the 2022 AZA annual conference in late August 2022. While we do not know which individuals will comprise the members of the Visiting Committee that will do the accreditation inspection in the spring of 2023, we do know that they will come from the group that will be on Zoo grounds for Zoo Day during the 2022 annual conference. Thus, they will be scrutinizing The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore twice within 8 months. Approval of these funds will maximize our ability to properly and completely prepare for these two activities.

The uses of funding in the category of Basic Infrastructure Improvements include correcting life-safety/USDA/AZA/Animal Welfare, perimeter fence and gate repair and replacement, emergency backup generators, and service road/storm water replacement.

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The African Watering Hole exhibit was constructed in 1990. The life support system for the water feature in this exhibit has exceeded its useful life and is no longer consistently able to maintain the water up to USDA potable drinking water standards as mandated by the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). Should the USDA during their annual inspection find that the water quality does not meet AWA standards, we would be given a 30/60/90 day window to correct the violation. If unable to correct the violation in this time frame, the Zoo could be asked to drain the water feature until such time as the repairs could be made. The water feature acts as a barrier between two habitats and closure of one or both of the exhibits may be necessary.

Both the exterior and the interior of Chimpanzee Forest require significant renovation. Replacement of the mesh on the outdoor exhibit will help assure that there are fewer possibilities for harm to the animals, keepers, and guests. Construction of a new animal climbing structure will greatly improve the habitat for the chimpanzees by giving them additional shade and places to rest and reduce the need to hang ropes from the ceiling of the exhibit. This will reduce the stress on the wire mesh panels that cover the top of the exhibit. The guest experience will also be enhanced as a result of mesh replacement by reducing the number of steel support structures and improving the glass observation area for a better viewing experience. Additionally, the interior windows in Chimp Forest must be replaced.

There is a recurring problem with the players at the Disc Golf Course behind the Zoo cutting the perimeter fence at the Animal Hospital to retrieve their discs. There is fencing material that is superior to chain link fence that is difficult to climb, difficult to dig beneath, and cannot be cut with bolt cutters. This funding will allow us to erect 1000 feet of fencing at the Hospital to help eliminate the continual need for repair or replacement.

The Elephant Barn is in need of a new roof. As the renovation was completed, it became clear the roof was in worse shape than originally thought and that the connection between the existing roof and the two new additions was not as watertight as anticipated. A dry building is a requirement of USDA and AZA. Installation of a new metal roof over the existing roof will be less disruptive to the elephants and can be done more quickly and less expensively than tearing off and replacing the existing metal roof.

Wet wells are part of the life support systems for the two polar bear exhibits. The valves in the wet wells have exceeded their useful life and need to be replaced. The wet wells are constructed of concrete, are leaking at the seams, and need to be resealed. As a result of the valves not sealing properly, the pools lose water, and we are at times unable to operate them. This makes management of the pools increasingly more difficult and time consuming.

These capital requests highlight the critical role the State has played, plays, and will continue to play in maintaining both the living collection and the infrastructure that have been the hallmark of the preeminent, and only AZA-accredited, zoo in the State of Maryland. The Fiscal Year 2022 capital items are important to the well-being of the animals in our care because of their direct impact to the animals' environment and staff's ability to safely reach them.

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I feel privileged to be the President and CEO of the Zoo because being here allows me to be in a place where the work makes a significant difference on a daily basis. No other institution in North America can match the conservation work we have done for 50 years with African Black Footed Penguins. This is one of our Signature Animal Programs (SAPs) which are species at the Zoo for which we have extensive expertise. Other SAPs include the Panamanian Golden Frog, Polar Bears, African Elephants, Maryland Native Species, and Great Apes. The last of these is why the Zoo was selected by the AZA to adopt Maisie, a baby chimpanzee born at the Oklahoma City Zoo whose mother had rejected her.

<https://www.marylandzoo.org/news-and-updates/2020/10/the-maryland-zoo-in-baltimore-provides-new-home-for-infant-chimpanzee/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B36tBRwsgws>

The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore is a place to which all Marylanders can be proud to come and bring their families and friends. It is a place of education. It is a place of conservation. It is a place of nature. It is a place of history. It is a place to connect Marylanders to all of these things.

The Maryland Zoological Society and the staff of The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore are extremely grateful to the State for its capital project funding and to these Subcommittees for their long standing support. **We respectfully request approval of full funding for The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore.**