



Date: March 11, 2024

Bill: SB 361 – Creation of a State Debt – M.C.C.B.L. of 2024

Item: Miscellaneous – ZA00 – National Aquarium

Position: Approve

The National Aquarium requests a **favorable report for the \$1 million included in the Governor's Fiscal Year 2025 Capital Budget** for the National Aquarium. Additionally, we respectfully request that the General Assembly allocate an **additional \$2.5 million** to the National Aquarium to cover urgent capital needs, bringing the total FY 2025 capital grant to \$3.5 million.

The National Aquarium appreciates the State of Maryland's long-standing commitment to assisting us in meeting our capital needs. Historically, the state has been the Aquarium's single largest investor and partner. We rely on state capital support to help us meet critical infrastructure needs and we are grateful to be included in Governor Moore's capital budget at \$1 million in FY 2025. That said, the amount currently allocated falls substantially short of the state funding requested to meet urgent needs in the upcoming fiscal year.

Fully funding the National Aquarium's FY 2025 request will allow us to move forward with two urgent projects: Replacing the flat roof on the Pier 4 building and completing public safety and lighting improvements on our campus. The flat roof on Pier 4 was last replaced more than 20 years ago and the roof leaks in multiple locations, requiring frequent and expensive repairs. The replacement cost is \$3 million and accounts for a significant share of the Aquarium's projected FY 2025 capital spend of \$10 million. This project is our top critical infrastructure priority in FY 2025. Deferring it will increase the cost and risk significant failures that could put human and animal safety in jeopardy.

The remainder of our request is for \$500,000 in FY 2025 to complete public safety and lighting upgrades throughout the Aquarium's campus. Last year, the Aquarium requested \$1 million from the state to address more than \$1.5 million in public safety and lighting needs on our campus. We are grateful that the General Assembly partially funded that request by including \$500,000 in the FY 2024 capital budget for this project. We respectfully request that the state provide additional funding this year to allow the National Aquarium to replace temporary, inefficient lighting fixtures and install a comprehensive security camera network on our piers. Due to outmoded and broken legacy lighting systems, our campus is inadequately lit at night, and we have experienced an increase in vandalism and street crimes on our piers, despite enhanced presence by local police in the Inner Harbor.

Without additional state support, we risk deferring these urgent infrastructure projects. The National Aquarium already faces \$94 million in critical infrastructure needs over the next eight years. Current funding levels will not allow us to address our most critical needs in FY 2025.

We understand the many demands placed on the state capital budget and the uncertainty of the current fiscal climate. Capital support for the National Aquarium helps ensure the Aquarium's continued ability to provide a significant return on investment to Maryland taxpayers. As a proven economic engine for the state, the Aquarium generates \$430 million in annual economic impact and \$36 million in annual tax revenue, while supporting 3,400 jobs statewide. For every \$1 in state funding invested, the National Aquarium returns \$9 in tax revenue. This impact is the direct result of the state's steady investments in the Aquarium's capital needs. We are asking you to continue this partnership at the meaningful level of \$3.5 million for FY 2025.

We are grateful for the State's continued support. Without it, we would not be one of America's top aquariums—nor could we provide generations of Marylanders with an unequaled cultural and educational resource. **We respectfully request that the Committee support the \$1 million included in the FY 2025 Capital Budget and consider fully funding the National Aquarium's request of \$3.5 million in FY 2025.**

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PRESERVING MARYLAND’S TOP ATTRACTION

The National Aquarium generates \$431 million in annual economic impact and is responsible for \$1 of every \$6 of tourism related spending in Baltimore City. With the state’s partnership, the National Aquarium continues to address its critical infrastructure needs. The Aquarium has identified \$94 million in capital needs over the next eight years. Sustained state support allows the Aquarium to address critical needs responsibly.

PIER 4 ROOF REPLACEMENT

Requested funding in FY 2025 will support replacing the flat roof on Pier 4. Last replaced in 2002, the new roof will cost \$2.9 million and is designed to accept solar and green roof technologies in the near future. State funds recently enabled the Aquarium to replace the flat roof on Pier 3, a project that included 60% MBE participation.

FY 2025-2029 FUNDING REQUEST

CAPITAL NEEDS \$94 MILLION

FY 2025 REQUEST \$3.5 MILLION

Critical Infrastructure \$3.0 million

Public Safety & Lighting \$0.5 million

OUTYEAR FUNDING \$3 MILLION/
YEAR



PUBLIC SAFETY AND LIGHTING

Outdated fixtures and temporary holiday string lights illuminate the National Aquarium's piers. The piers also lack the infrastructure to support a comprehensive security camera network. These inefficient and inadequate conditions create guest and staff safety concerns.

COMPLETING SAFETY UPGRADES

The state partially funded public safety and lighting improvements on the National Aquarium's piers in FY 2024. The requested funding in FY 2025 (\$500,000) will help us complete approximately \$1.5 million in public safety upgrades on both piers.

