

Date: February 18, 2015

Bill: HB 70 | SB 55 – Operating Budget
Funding for State Aided Educational Institutions (SAI)
National Aquarium (\$474,601)

Position: Strongly Support

The National Aquarium serves nearly 60,000 Maryland schoolchildren, teachers, and chaperones each year from some 800 local schools in every jurisdiction in the State. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) State Aided Educational Institutions (SAI) funding offsets 52 percent of the cost of the overall Maryland school program and the Aquarium uses operating funding to cover the remaining cost. Over 2.5 million Maryland schoolchildren have visited since the National Aquarium opened in 1981.

The SAI program is critical to ensuring that all Maryland schoolchildren have the opportunity to benefit from the Aquarium’s mission to *inspire conservation of the world’s aquatic treasures*. Diverse exhibits invite students to travel through the coral reefs of Australia, the tree canopies of an Amazon rain forest, and the shark-filled waters of the Atlantic Ocean within a matter of hours. Students come face to face with over 17,000 animals from 750 species of fish, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. All the while interactive and engaging exhibits educate students on the everyday ways that their actions in Maryland can positively impact the Chesapeake Bay and the world’s oceans.

In May of this year, the Aquarium experience will be even more engaging and educational for children as we open *Living Seashore* – a family-focused exhibit that combines state-of-the-art exhibit technology and direct interaction with animals. *Living Seashore* will take visitors beyond the boardwalk to the crashing waves, sandy beaches, and shifting dunes of the ever-changing Mid-Atlantic seashore and will teach the next generation of conservation leaders about the wonders of their own backyard.

Living Seashore
Opening May, 2015



As they explore the sandy shore, guests will have the opportunity to discover and learn about some of the beach’s hidden treasures, such as horseshoe crabs, sand dollars and egg cases on a tactile discovery wall that brings a “slice of the beach” to eye level.

Along the edge of the touchpools, visitors will join National Aquarium interpreters to gently touch the prickly pointed spines of a purple sea urchin; graze their hand over the sleek, muscular wing of an Atlantic stingray; and feel the mysterious, firm bell of a pulsing moon jelly.



KEY EDUCATION FACTS

The National Aquarium serves 57,826 Maryland school children, teachers, and chaperones each year.

- Over 53,000 of these individuals receive free admission with the help of the MSDE grant:
- Annually, over 500 teachers receive free curriculum training from the National Aquarium.
- Additionally, the National Aquarium provides the following educational opportunities for Maryland school children:
 - Wetland Nurseries at schools
 - Terrapins in the Classrooms
 - Aquarium on Wheels

GENERAL INFORMATION

Economic contributions

- The National Aquarium is an economic engine for Maryland and Baltimore City, contributing:
 - \$314 million in economic impact; and
 - \$11.7 million and \$5.9 million in fiscal impact on tax revenues for Maryland and Baltimore City, respectively.
- Two-thirds of Aquarium visitors are from out of state and the National Aquarium is the #1 tourist destination in the State.

Accessibility

- Over 170,000 visitors per year take advantage of the Aquarium's discounted admissions programs:
 - Grade A Student Night
 - Maryland Mornings discount admission for Maryland residents
 - Fridays after Five discount admission
 - Annual Dollar Days
 - Pay What You Want Days

Living Seashore



For more information:

Sarah Elfreth | Government Affairs Director, National Aquarium | 410-986-2357 | SElfreth@aqua.org