



2400 East Fort Avenue  
Baltimore, MD 21230  
410.962.4290 x 850

[friendsoffortmchenry.org](http://friendsoffortmchenry.org)

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Friends of Fort McHenry -- Support for the "Paul S. Sarbanes Visitor and Education Center"

Dear Members of the Maryland Congressional Delegation:

We write today to express our enthusiastic support for a proposed effort to name the visitor and education center at Fort McHenry in memory of the late Senator Paul S. Sarbanes. With our stewardship role at Fort McHenry, we were honored to have Senator Sarbanes as a tireless champion of the fort throughout his long career. In so many different ways, he helped to promote the fort's chief objectives of commemorating the events of the Battle of Baltimore while facilitating public enjoyment and understanding of the historic events and people connected with the site. For all these reasons, we urge you to advance legislation to designate the "Paul S. Sarbanes Visitor and Education Center" at Fort McHenry.

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Senator Sarbanes' legacy of public service can be felt across the country, but nowhere is it stronger than at Fort McHenry, which he often described as his favorite national park. The Senator considered the site to be one of the great public gathering places in our state – a guardian of our national heritage and a key recreational and environmental resource for the residents of Baltimore.

Over decades, the Senator secured millions of dollars in federal funds to enable critical repairs to the fort's deteriorating seawall, masonry, and foundations, ensuring the site will be safe to visit for generations to come. He also envisioned Fort McHenry's inclusion in the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail, championing legislation to study and eventually create a National Trail to highlight the British burning of the White House and Capitol in Washington, D.C., the Battle of Baltimore, and the bombing of Fort McHenry, which inspired Francis Scott Key's composition of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Senator Sarbanes also worked to elevate the history of the War of 1812 in the national consciousness by introducing federal legislation to commemorate the war's bicentennial. Through his service as Vice-Chair of the Maryland War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission from 2007 to 2015, the Senator helped improve and protect relevant historic sites like Fort McHenry and coordinate public and private events to celebrate the anniversary. Finally, in the 2000's, the Senator was integral in securing the funds that enabled construction of a new visitor and education center at the fort, replacing the old visitor center from the 1960's with an ADA-compliant building that today welcomes hundreds of thousands of visitors a year as they learn about one of the defining moments in our nation's history.

The Board of the Friends of Fort McHenry, a non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the widest possible appreciation of Fort McHenry's enduring legacy and the fort's survival as an "historic shrine" for future generations of Americans, is very grateful that Senator Sarbanes so steadfastly shared our passion and goals for the fort. We wholeheartedly believe that designating the fort's welcome center as the "Paul S. Sarbanes Visitor and Education Center" would be a fitting tribute to the Senator's life and career and serve as a permanent expression of his close association with the fort.

Best,

Director, Friends of Fort McHenry