

**S.B. 820 — Public Water Systems — Supplier Requirements
(Water Quality Accountability Act of 2020)**

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
March 5, 2020

Position: UNFAVORABLE

Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Honorable Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

My name is Rianna Eckel, and I am the Senior Maryland Organizer with Food & Water Action. On behalf of Food & Water Action and our 43,000 members in Maryland, I strongly **urge you to oppose the Water Quality Accountability Act, SB 820**. This bill is model legislation from the corporate water industry, which seeks aggressively to take over public water systems across our state, particularly in western Maryland. It would lead to rate hikes on families and local businesses.

Do not be fooled by the bill name: This is a water privatization bill.

We recognize the need to improve our water systems, but the state must provide real support to help struggling public systems. Vulnerable communities need **more** help, not less. This legislation threatens to take away all existing state and federal assistance from our most vulnerable systems that cannot meet new mandates in the bill.

That's how water corporations seek to get a foothold in communities – you burden small towns with unfunded mandates and then you take away all public support, leaving vulnerable communities susceptible to corporate exploitation. The current president and CEO of American Water, the nation's largest private water corporation, told investors in December that this legislation is the last of three steps in its water privatization agenda. He said, and I quote:

“We work with state legislators and regulators to come up with rule making and legislation that enables these acquisitions to happen. And we've been doing this for a decade, and we've been very successful at it. This public policy, the really 3 areas have helped us grow: fair market value legislation, consolidated tariffs and then emerging legislation around the Water Quality Accountability Act.”

Our communities across the state face a deepening water affordability emergency. It isn't hurting Baltimore alone. Water bills are some of the most regressive fees that families pay. Communities simply cannot afford water privatization: private companies charge 59 percent more than local governments do.

We urge you to prioritize legislation that provides state funding to help address the more pressing public health threats that our water systems face, including drinking water contamination from lead, PFAS forever chemicals and other toxics, as well as sewage backups and wastewater overflows from outdated sewer systems. Our water providers already have sizable tasks and state legislation should focus on **helping** them rise to these challenges and provide the highest quality water possible.

Please issue an **UNFAVORABLE** report on SB 820. Thank you for your time and attention.

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