



Maryland

Department of the Environment

Larry Hogan, Governor
Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor

Ben Grumbles, Secretary
Horacio Tablada, Deputy Secretary

February 26, 2020

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: House Bill 836 – Sewage Treatment Plants – Effluent Discharges – Impacts on Midge Populations

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) has reviewed House Bill 836, entitled Sewage Treatment Plants – Effluent Discharges – Impacts on Midge Populations and would like to offer a letter of information regarding this legislation.

House Bill 836 requires MDE to conduct water quality monitoring and to evaluate whether and to what extent water quality may influence midge populations and phytoplankton growth levels. MDE would be required to report to the General Assembly with results and recommendations within one year. There would be associated staffing, fieldwork and laboratory costs required that are unbudgeted and beyond current funding levels. MDE has the expertise to undertake the work but current staff are focused on significant, mandated requirements to protect public health throughout the year in tidal and non-tidal environments. Existing staff are fully engaged in responsibilities monitoring and responding to harmful algal blooms and toxic events that threaten fish, animals and citizens who contact ambient waters. While large midge populations can be a nuisance, they are not a health threat to the local population and environment.

Additionally, the timeframe when MDE biologists, analysts and response staff conduct their most time-sensitive seasonal work would coincide with the outlined project, potentially causing limited staff to have to choose which public health priority to address at the cost of another. In order to continue the water quality investigations at our current level and to complete the study required by HB 836, MDE would need to hire an additional two researchers on a contractual basis. The study at minimum, would need to be conducted at five different locations representing the variety of receiving waters in the State (non-tidal low flow, flowing, tidal flowing, tidal embayment, control). Sampling locations would need to be established at the point of discharge, as well as upstream and downstream of the point of discharge. Constant monitoring would need to be completed throughout the summer months. As the bill is drafted, it does not provide any funding to hire additional staff and equipment.

Thank you for your consideration. We will continue to monitor House Bill 836 during the Committee's deliberations, and I am available to answer any questions you may have. Please feel free to contact me at 410-260-6301 or by e-mail at tyler.abbott@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tyler Abbott".

Tyler Abbott

cc: The Honorable Robin L. Grammer Jr.