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House Bill HB 1069 Water Supply –Private Well Safety Program

**Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
March 31, 2021**

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Currently Maryland does not require testing most private wells and does not document any test results that are done after the initial installation test. The only private wells that are required to be tested are commercial facilities regulated by the MD Dept. of Health and as a condition of their operating permit. Testing is needed to help ensure the citizens of Maryland are protected from groundwater contamination.

Passing HB 1069 as amended by the House will mean regular well testing for renters. This is a good start. But we need to quickly expand this program to requiring more testing statewide, tracking those results to spot areas of concern and importantly offering grants to fix these problems including polluting septic systems. We cannot simply pretend there is no problem because we are not testing for it. Other states like Florida that have a well surveillance program ⁽¹⁾ have found contaminated wells and identified wells that maybe in danger of contamination.

Septic systems are a leading cause of well water contamination. There are approximately 450,000 septic systems in Maryland and the EPA estimates 10% of those fail every year. I can attest that over the last year my calls for failing septic systems have skyrocketed. The combination of aging systems, poor design or installation, increased heavy rains and people home instead of work or school has played havoc on septic systems.

Failing systems cause problems beyond household sewage bubbling up in yards or basements. Emergency room visits for gastrointestinal illnesses increase after heavy precipitation ⁽²⁾. Viruses and pathogens from improperly treated wastewater travel in our groundwater. The Norovirus can last up 60 days and the Coronavirus can last up to 14 days in groundwater ⁽³⁾.

Households are not required to have their well water tested even after a septic failure. They also do not have to notify the neighbors of any problems.

As the conversation continues on well testing I would suggest the required that the test include optical brighteners and artificial sweeteners. Since, testing for E.coli and nitrates do not properly

indicate if well water has been contaminated by wastewater. Testing for viruses and pathogens is expensive and time consuming, while testing for optical brighteners and artificial sweeteners is not. These will indicate the likelihood of contamination of virus and pathogens. If a well test positive using this less expansive test then the more expensive test can be used for further information.

I will leave you with one final thought. The water that everyone flushes someone eventually drinks. That is the main reason for testing.

I urge a favorable report.

Thank you,

Matthew Geckle
Vice-President

Notes:

1. Florida well testing:

<http://www.floridahealth.gov/environmental-health/drinking-water/well-surveys.html>

2. Emergency room visits:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=emergency+room+visits+for+gastrointestinal+illness+increase+after+heavy+rains&oq=EM&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j35i39l2j0i67l2j0i433j46i67i131i433j0i67l2j46i67i433.3474j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

3. Norovirus:

Norovirus is highly resistant to environmental degradation in various water types and long-term infectivity has been reported for groundwater which when seeded with the prototype norovirus (GI.1 Norwalk virus) was infectious for at least 61 days.

<https://www.waterpathogens.org/book/norovirus-and-other-caliciviruses#:~:text=Norovirus%20is%20highly%20resistant%20to,for%20at%20least%2061%20days.>