



TESTIMONY FOR HB1069 WATER SUPPLY – PRIVATE WELL SAFETY PROGRAM

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Stewart
Committee: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs
Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition
Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair
Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB1069 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

Maryland seems to be consistently behind most states in environmental protections. More than 2 million people in our state, or a third of our population, have little to no protections on their water supply. Maryland is among five states with the fewest protections on well water safety. The state does not offer free or low-cost test kits, require notification of well testing results by property owners to potential sellers or tenants, or maintain a public database of well testing results. Furthermore, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) has not reported to the General Assembly on the state's Groundwater Protection Program since 2013, leaving many wondering whether the state's groundwater resources are being regularly monitored.

Given the data that we do have, Maryland well water is dangerous to drink. Studies show the prevalence of nitrate—an odorless, colorless, and tasteless contaminant often found in groundwater, and linked to cancer—in private wells on the state's Lower Eastern Shore. Common sources of nitrate include excess application of manure and fertilizer to fields, as well as septic system drainage. Researchers found that one in 25 wells tested in Wicomico and Worcester counties since 1965 had nitrate levels above the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) safe drinking water threshold. Additionally, data from the U.S. Geological Survey and the Chesapeake Bay Program show that nitrogen levels have steadily increased in Lower Eastern Shore waterways.

Although MDE operates a Be Well Wise public education program, evidence suggests this isn't enough. In a 2020 poll of Lower Eastern Shore residents, nearly three-quarters of private well owners stated that they had never tested their well water, or had not done so in the last year (the state recommends testing annually). The most common explanation for not testing was, "I didn't know I needed to." The survey also showed that lower-income residents were less likely to test their wells, indicating that testing costs may be a barrier to maintaining well safety.

This bill would establish a Private Well Safety Program that would provide Marylanders who get their water from a private well with the necessary resources and information to monitor and safeguard their household drinking water, and ultimately protect their and their family's health. Given that there are many Marylanders who are being slowly poisoned by their drinking water, with no support from the state, our members strongly believe that this legislation is critical.

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.