

Date: February 22, 2021

Kumar Barve, Chair  
House Environment & Transportation Committee  
House Office Building, Room 251  
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401 - 1991



re: **HB 1069**-Maryland Private Well Safety Program

POSITION: Favorable

Honorable Chairman and Committee Members:

Mountain Maryland Movement is an organization advocating for clean energy and environmental protection in far western Maryland. We write in support of **HB-1069**—establishing a Maryland Private Well Safety Program.

In mountain Maryland's two rural counties, Allegany and Garrett, much of the population relies on residential groundwater wells as the water source for their homes. In Garrett, the more rural of the two counties, there are more than 14,390 residential water wells in a county with a population of 29,235 (2019). The county's most recent Comprehensive Plan (2008) notes that approximately 76% of its households rely on water wells. More populated Allegany County relies on a mix of smaller community systems that provide water using both wells and springs, as well as municipal systems and residential water wells.

When Maryland's environmental agencies were studying the prospect of allowing hydraulic fracturing for shale gas, attempts were made to document the baseline water quality status of groundwater in the two mountain counties on the Marcellus. Several local wells were tested by the Maryland Geological Survey. But most mountain landowners wishing to protect their water sources learned at that time that we are basically on our own to find a way to test and document the quality of our water.

The troubling reality for rural residents across Maryland is:

- we know very little about the safety and makeup of our drinking water,
- protections under the Federal Safe Drinking Water Act do not extend to private drinking wells and smaller community-based water systems, and
- testing of water wells is cost prohibitive for many households.

The US EPA suggests that water wells be tested annually for contaminants, but Maryland (unlike most other states) does not require periodic testing of well water and reporting results to a local health department.

If a private individual wishes to test a residential water well, rudimentary home test kits can be purchased for as little as \$25-\$60, but those will not provide a thorough analysis of how safe the water is to drink. According to SimpleLab, a health services testing company associated with UC Berkeley, "a good overview of well water quality will run around \$200-\$300, but it's possible to spend \$2,000 for extremely thorough tests."

Maryland's rural mountain counties are not wealthy and it is safe to assume that most people do not seek out costly elective well testing unless a problem is suspected. If a health problem motivates water testing, it may likely be too late for mitigation to remedy health problems caused by exposure to contaminants.

An organized system of regular testing, with financial assistance for water testing, as well as reporting and remediation when problems are found would provide much needed protection for rural Marylanders who drink from groundwater wells. **House Bill 1069**, sponsored by Delegate Vaughn Stewart, would bring Maryland in line with basic protections that other states provide to well owners by establishing a Private Well Safety Program.

It is clear that communities near livestock farming on Maryland's Eastern shore need this program to identify nitrate pollution. Please be aware that thousands more in rural western Maryland communities are also at risk from various sources of contamination, ranging from agricultural applications and mining impacts, to industrial products and road treatments. A Source Water Assessment by Maryland Department of the Environment for wells in Allegany County lists potential pollution sources that include Inorganic Compounds, Radionuclides (Radon222), Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs), Synthetic Organic Compounds (SOCs), and Microbiological Contaminants.

It's time to protect rural Marylanders by offering financial assistance for well water testing or well remediation, by notifying private well owners of nearby groundwater contamination, by providing transparent, online access to well data information, and by requiring landlords and property owners to disclose recent well water quality results to tenants or potential home buyers. The public good will be served when people know what's in their water, and test results are shared with local county health departments.

We urge Maryland lawmakers to support House Bill 1069 to put in place essential protections that will ensure safe drinking water for all Marylanders.

Respectfully,  
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