

Gene von Gunten

HB 302 Environment – On-Site Wastewater Services – Regulation House Environment and Transportation January 15, 2021

Position: Support

My name is Gene von Gunten. I reside near Westminster, MD in Carroll County. I worked my entire professional life in local environmental health administration. I was employed by the Frederick County Health Department from 1978 to 1994, and the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services (MCDPS) from 1994 until my retirement in 2017.

My entire career was involved with individual water well and septic system matters. I have presented at professional conferences, including the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers and the Maryland Groundwater Symposium. I have an active license as a Registered Sanitarian. At my retirement, I was the Supervisor of the Well & Septic Section at MCDPS. In addition, I have resided in 4 homes in my life. All have been served by water wells and septic systems.

My testimony is intended to illustrate the impact this bill would have upon local environmental health departments across the State. Most of these departments are under-staffed and struggle with staff recruitment and retention. At the same time, the State has reserved upon these departments nearly all the responsibility for the design, construction, installation, and oversight of almost all on-site systems. This arrangement is not functioning well in many counties as the staffing levels are simply inadequate. In addition, many local health departments do not have the legal resources required to pursue and prosecute bad actors.

The time has come to unburden local health and stimulate the private sector industry necessary to provide on-site services. HB 302 will establish an effective Board to oversee the entire on-site environment. It will remove excess workload from both the local health departments and the Maryland Department of the Environment. It will give these regulators an important tool to ensure on-site systems are properly established and maintained; and begin to establish a healthy public/private sector partnership to move on-site forward.

Of course, the benefit to the on-site user/owner will be substantial. A homeowner who hires a wastewater professional; to design, to construct; to maintain their system will have a Board with oversight and regulatory power to make sure that consumer is well served. The Code of Ethics included will finally elevate the wastewater industry to a proper level.

I hope you will support HB 302 and the entire on-site wastewater industry.