



ST. MARY'S COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Meenakshi G. Brewster, MD, MPH - Health Officer

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Bill: **HB 473** – Environment - Ambient Air Monitoring - Particulate and Fine Particulate Matter Availability and Use - Policies
COMMITTEE: House Economic Matters Committee
POSITION: **Letter of Interest & Information**

St. Mary's County Health Department (SMCHD) is interested in HB473, which would require ambient air quality monitors to measure the levels of particulate matter in over-burdened and underserved Maryland communities. The purpose of this letter is to provide information about the BreatheWell St. Mary's initiative which may be helpful to legislators as they consider the merits of HB 473.

In March of 2021, the St. Mary's County Equity Task Force - a partnership of the St. Mary's County Health Department, St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office, and St. Mary's County Public Schools - [launched the BreatheWell St. Mary's initiative](#)

(<https://smchd.org/2021/03/equity-task-force-announces-local-air-quality-monitoring-network/>)

BreatheWell St. Mary's was a product of the Task Force's focus on advancing equity in health, public safety, and education. It is an important step in providing both ambient and indoor air quality data important for protecting health, promoting occupational safety, and supporting educational training.

[BreatheWell St. Mary's \(smchd.org/breathewell\)](#) is a comprehensive air quality monitoring, indoor air purifying, and health education initiative for St. Mary's County. In addition to indoor air quality sensors at public safety headquarters and HEPA air purifiers positioned throughout public safety, Fire Rescue, EMS, public health and public library facilities in the county, BreatheWell St. Mary's features an outdoor air quality monitoring network covering the expanse of the whole county. Low-cost outdoor air quality monitors were installed on all public schools in St. Mary's County and at St. Mary's College of Maryland. The monitors measure particulate matter, ozone, nitrogen dioxide, and other elements in the ambient air that affect health, including respiratory conditions like asthma. Data from the outdoor air sensors is converted into a user-friendly Air Quality Index that is transmitted real-time to an air quality data dashboard maintained on the SMCHD website: smchd.org/breathewell. Raw data is available as well. The health department webpage also maintains information on how community members can interpret the data and translate it to protective health actions. This is especially important for those families who have children or others affected by asthma, a health condition which may be impacted by outdoor air quality.

Data from this new air quality monitoring network is useful for both individual community members as well as community partners working to improve health. The local health improvement coalition for St. Mary's County has outlined strategies to reduce the exposure of community members to unhealthy air in the Healthy St. Mary's 2026 plan utilizing data from the BreatheWell St. Mary's air quality monitoring network. Both public and non-public schools are using the data dashboard as an instructional resource for their health and science curriculum. Individual residents are consulting the dashboard to make daily protective health decisions based on this information. We anticipate these actions will lead to decreased emergency department visits due to asthma exacerbation, lower overall health care costs, less missed days of school and work, and better quality of life for our community members.

Sincerely,

Meenakshi G. Brewster, MD, MPH
St. Mary's County Health Officer