



March 1, 2023

**Bill: Sewage Treatment Plants - Effluent Discharges, Discharge Permits, and Property Tax Credit for Impacted Dwellings (HB 924)**

**Position: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

Blue Water Baltimore's mission is to restore the quality of Baltimore's rivers, streams, and Harbor to foster a healthy environment, a strong economy, and thriving communities. **We write today in support of HB 924: Sewage Treatment Plants - Effluent Discharges, Discharge Permits, and Property Tax Credit for Impacted Dwellings.**

Blue Water Baltimore is deeply familiar with the systemic problems with Baltimore's water infrastructure, from sewage overflows into our local waterways to sewage backups into residents' homes. We are plaintiff intervenors in the City's Modified Consent Decree for sewage overflows, long-time advocates for assistance for residents impacted by sewage overflows and backups, and are currently party to a lawsuit focused on Clean Water Act violations at the Back River and Patapsco Wastewater Treatment Plants (WWTPs). As a Waterkeeper organization Blue Water Baltimore speaks on behalf of the Patapsco and Back Rivers, and we seek to amplify the voices of the people who live, work, and recreate near these waterways.

These rivers accept the effluent from two of Maryland's largest wastewater treatment plants, the Patapsco and Back River WWTPs. **The health of the entire Chesapeake Bay hinges upon the performance of these two facilities, but when there are problems that cause these plants to discharge too much pollution into the rivers, it is our members and our local communities who are most severely impacted and pay the highest price.**

These wastewater treatment facilities are equipped with some of the most cutting-edge technologies available, giving the plants the ability to produce effluent that meets and even exceeds the standards for Enhanced Nutrient Removal systems. When properly maintained and operated, the Patapsco and Back River wastewater treatment plants have the capacity to function as world-class facilities. However, due to their size and flow capacity, failures at these facilities can have catastrophic ecological and public health impacts to their namesake rivers and the people who rely on them for their very way of life. That is why additional scrutiny and safeguards are needed to ensure that any potential problems are identified and rectified as quickly as possible, before they snowball into environmental disasters.

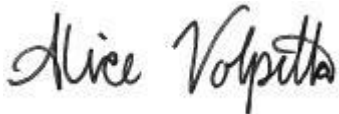
As the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. There has already been significant local, state, and federal funding put into Maryland's largest WWTPs, and we must protect those investments. HB 924 will provide the following additional protections that are designed to empower the Maryland Department of the Environment to identify and remediate operations problems at large wastewater treatment plants before they worsen and increase the costs to nearby residents, the environment, and taxpayers across the state:

- Requires MDE to monitor effluent release;
- Requires MDE to place an inspector at a sewage treatment plant that releases effluent or bacteria beyond its permit, fails to meet operation or maintenance standards, or fails to submit an updated wastewater capacity plan;
- Requires MDE to report to the General Assembly regular status updates and steps taken to remediate problems;
- Requires MDE to offer suggestions on new pollution control technologies to those seeking permit renewal; and
- Sets statutory limits on nitrogen, phosphorus, and bacteria release.

Additionally, Blue Water Baltimore recognizes that not all Marylanders are impacted equally by the failures of these wastewater treatment facilities. HB 924 requires MDE to investigate the link between the Back River WWTP and the exploding midge populations in the area, which is an important protection for residents who otherwise have very little recourse for dealing with this major quality-of-life concern.

This bill enhances oversight and transparency for two of Maryland's largest wastewater treatment facilities, which service more than 1.8 million people and discharge directly into waterways that are regularly used for boating, fishing, and swimming. **For these reasons, Blue Water Baltimore strongly supports HB 924 and we urge a favorable report.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alice Volpitta". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alice Volpitta  
Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper