

**In Favor of HB245 -  
Department of the Environment – Fees, Penalties, Funding, and Regulation**

To Environment and Transportation Committee Members,

My name is Eddie Harrison, I am the legislative liaison representing MOWPA (Maryland Onsite Wastewater Professionals Association). MOWPA represents all Maryland professionals in the Onsite Industry. We have in our membership: Installers, Pumpers, Engineers, Property Transfer Inspectors, Operation and Maintenance Providers, and Code Officials.

I represent MOWPA as an un-compensated Legislative Liaison, current Vice-President, and former Board President.

My day job is the owner of BAT Onsite, LLC. BAT Onsite, LLC., which is primarily an Operation and Maintenance Provider for automated Onsite Wastewater Systems. Including: Advanced Treatment Units (including BAT), Pump Systems, Mound Systems, Drip Dispersal Systems, and pretty much any Onsite Wastewater System that requires electrical/mechanical operation under 5,000 gallons per day. I am currently servicing over 500 units, covering the whole State of Maryland. I have been working in the Onsite Wastewater Industry as an installer, pumper, designer, property transfer inspector, and operation and maintenance provider since 1984.

**Statement**

The Onsite Wastewater System (Septic System) is the most expensive appliance in the home.

**I am here to support HB245**, as it relates to MDE charging fees for well and septic permits when they have taken over the County Health Departments. (p. 5, lines 29 -31 and p. 6, lines 1 – 13) The remainder of this bill relates to subjects that MOWPA has no official opinion.

MOWPA's membership has witnessed the progressive decline of services in most of the local Health Departments and the Onsite Division of the Maryland Department of the Environment for the past 20 some years. Meanwhile, the complexity of Onsite Wastewater Systems has increased, and the number of failing system repairs has increased. This has significantly increased the workload for these departments while the number of staff members have decreased. We believe that some of these offices are in a crisis mode and may collapse. This is why MDE is asking for this change.

Most local Health Departments are financially supported with State funds. A few Health Departments are self-funded (with no State dollars). Another few are State funded and then subsidized with additional county funds. The counties that fit the last two scenarios are not struggling with the staffing and overload issues to the level that is plaguing the smaller jurisdictions. This is due to larger employment packages in those Counties.

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Back during the early 2000s, budget constraints started a trend of not replacing staff that may leave a position, or seemed to be in no hurry to fill vacant positions. We also started seeing smaller counties hiring staff, provide training and experience, only to see them migrate to larger counties, federal government, private industry, or other employment opportunities for more pay. This trend has increased over the years, to a point where we are in crisis. The current staff work hard to do the best job they can, but some staff have left from the frustration and workload.

For example, when I started working with one local Health Department in the 80s, there was a Health Director, two Deputy Health Directors, four Area Sanitarians (inspecting new systems and repairs) and three "Subdivision" Sanitarians (dealing with new lot percolation tests and plan review for property development). Today in that same County they have one Health Director, one Deputy Health Director, two Area Sanitarians, and one Subdivision Sanitarian trying to accomplish the same job with a larger workload.

Many of the seasoned staff in these departments have moved on. Many of the current staff are young and inexperienced. New hires are increasingly difficult to attract. It is not surprising that MDE will be taking over some of these local departments, but the fact is MDE doesn't have the staff to provide the services that are needed in our profession.

Allowing MDE to charge for permitting in counties they have taken over is a needed step to help MDE perform their services, but the bigger problem that needs to be addressed is acquiring more qualified help for all of these departments.

From MOWPA's point of view, the well and septic departments in the local jurisdictions and in the State of Maryland perform a vital service for Maryland citizens to protect property values, protect public health, and to protect the environment.

I ask for favorable report of **HB245 Department of the Environment – Fees, Penalties, Funding, and Regulation**

Thank you for your time,

Eddie Harrison