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The Honorable Chair Feldman
The Honorable Vice Chair Kagan
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Senate of Maryland

February 3rd, 2026

**Senate Bill 189: Municipalities - Open Drainage Inlets - Required Grating Systems
(Mason's Law)**

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

This past July, 13-year-old Mason Kearns of Mount Airy drowned when a flash flood caused water to overflow behind his house, sweeping him into a nearby storm drain. It took over 45 minutes for first responders to recover Mason as the water rushing into the drain where Mason had been trapped had a current so strong it began to pull rescuers in as well.

Maggie McBain, one of the first responders who assisted in the recovery, had lasting bruises from the force of the water. Reflecting on the circumstances of the tragedy, McBain said that not only was it “100% preventable,” but that, “This place has gotten lucky it hasn’t already happened in the last 25 years.” The storm drain had a diameter of 17 inches and no marking to indicate its presence.

ProPublica reported that in 2021 at least three dozen people in a six-year period across the country had lost their lives from being swept into storm drains¹. They also noted that flood deaths often do not include the details necessary to identify the cause as storm drains. Therefore, the real number is likely much higher.

Many drainage systems were designed based on historical rainfall data as a predictor of the capacity needed. In the Northeastern United States, the amount of rainfall from heavy events

¹ Sanders, Topher. 2021. “Storm Drains Keep Swallowing People During Floods.” ProPublica. <https://www.propublica.org/article/storm-drains-keep-swallowing-people-during-floods>.

increased by more than 70% from 1958 to 2010². Just one cubic foot of water weighs 62.4 pounds, and that's without considering velocity. A drainage system exceeding capacity raises the height of floodwater, which in turn increases the pressure against anyone caught in the water's current.

In response to ProPublica's report, the U.S. Department of House and Urban Development (HUD) issued a new rule in 2022 that HUD-funded projects must now consider whether they need "protective gates or angled safety grates for culverts and stormwater drains³." **Senate Bill 189**, or **Mason's Law**, will expand on this existing federal rule by requiring municipalities to install one of several types of drainage inlets meant precisely to prevent large debris and people from being swept in.

Specifically, the bill requires the installation of [Standard Yard Inlets](#), [Raised Grate Yard Inlets](#), or [Trash Rack Grating](#) on drainage pipes of 12 inches or more in diameter. It also requires that [Precast Concrete Boxes](#) be incorporated into new construction. Inlets are widely recognized as the safe, standard way of draining water while preventing people from being swept into the drainage system. Trash Racks similarly prevent people from being trapped and offer increased surface area to prevent blockages. These three options were included for their low-cost designs that would prevent drowning hazards and enable municipalities to select an option most suited for each drain's condition. For new construction, precast concrete boxes were selected for their resiliency and efficient design.

This bill is an opportunity for us to prevent what happened to Mason Kearns from happening to anyone else. I respectfully urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,



Senator Karen Lewis Young

² Association of State Floodplain Managers. 2024. "Climate Change Fueling Surge in Extreme Rainfall, Warns Climate Central Study." floods.org. <https://www.floods.org/news-views/research-and-reports/climate-change-fueling-surge-in-extreme-rainfall-warns-climate-central-study/>.

³ HUD's rule also requires the consideration of additional safety measures, and project leaders must explain to federal officials which safety features will be adopted and which were considered but not utilized.

Examples of grating:



Standard Yard Inlet



Raised Grate Yard Inlet



Trash Rack Inlet