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**SB0189**

February 3, 2026

**TO:** Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
**FROM:** Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations  
**RE:** Senate Bill 189 - Municipalities - Open Drainage Inlets - Required Grating Systems (Mason's Law)

**POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill 189 (SB 189) **with amendments**.

SB 189 establishes a statewide requirement for municipalities to construct or install approved grating systems on new and existing open drainage inlets. The bill requires an approved grating system to be placed over the opening of an open drainage inlet in order to allow stormwater runoff to enter the inlet while preventing large debris from entering the drainage inlet. SB 189 applies to open drainage inlets with surface openings of 12 inches or more and specifies the types of grating systems that qualify as approved. The bill requires municipalities to install approved grating systems on all existing open drainage inlets on or before June 1, 2027.

The BCA supports the intent of SB 189 to improve public safety around stormwater infrastructure. We respectfully request amendments to ensure the bill is technically sound and aligned with existing stormwater practice. As drafted, SB 189 would require municipalities to incorporate an approved grating system into the construction of any new open drainage inlet and to install an approved grating system on existing open drainage inlets. However, the bill's definition of "open drainage inlet" is broad and may create ambiguity regarding the types of stormwater structures subject to these requirements.

The State Highway Administration's Highway Drainage Manual recognizes four general types of drainage inlets: grate, curb, combination, and slotted (Section 5.2.4). The definition of "open drainage inlet" in SB 189 is broader than these recognized classifications and may create uncertainty as to whether the bill's requirements would also apply to structures such as headwalls, outfalls, or culverts, which are not typically classified by engineers as inlets. Amending the scope of the bill to focus on large, open culvert headwalls and similar inlet configurations associated with entrapment hazards, rather than all "open drainage inlets", would prioritize locations of the greatest concern and avoid retrofitting requirements for structures that currently present minimal risk.

**Commented [GK1]:** excellent term! It gets back to the intent of the bill.

Additionally, SB 189 requires each municipality in the State to install an approved grating system on any existing open drainage inlet within the municipality on or before June 1, 2027. This requirement raises significant fiscal and operational concerns, as it would require municipalities to inventory existing inlets that would become non-compliant, procure grating materials, complete installation, and hire the additional staffing and contracted services necessary. Most municipalities are currently in the budget planning phase for the next fiscal year, when implementation must be complete.

Functionally, the installation of grating systems may create choke points where debris can accumulate and block stormwater flow into the inlet structure, increasing the risk of flooding, due to ponding or redirection of flow. Following installation, municipalities will have to increase staff or contracted resources to maintain the grate and routinely remove any accumulated debris.

Finally, these requirements may be further complicated by the presence of drainage inlets located on private property, particularly in older developments, where ownership and access may be unclear. As currently drafted, the bill does not provide municipalities with clear legal authority to access or modify privately owned drainage infrastructure. Absent of such authority, compliance with the grating requirement may necessitate amended language to clarify responsibility for grating installation, as well as additional flexibility in implementation timelines for both the City and smaller municipalities.

Consideration of the proposed amendments would allow for smoother adoption of the bill and better alignment with current stormwater best practices. Additionally, supplementary efforts such as funding for education and outreach related to flooding, as well as increased training for local emergency responders on swift water rescues and flash flood events, may further support effective implementation. For these reasons, the BCA remains **supportive** of the intent of SB 189 and respectfully requests **consideration of amendments** to clarify the scope of the bill and support practicable implementation.

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