

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2024 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 256

(Delegate D. Jones, *et al.*)

Environment and Transportation

Judicial Proceedings

Waterway Incident Notification System (WINS) - Study

This bill requires the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM), in consultation with other interested stakeholders, to study and make recommendations regarding the feasibility of establishing a Waterway Incident Notification System (WINS) for specified purposes. MDEM must submit an interim report and a final report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by December 1, 2024, and December 1, 2025, respectively. **The bill takes effect June 1, 2024, and terminates June 30, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: No effect in FY 2024. General fund expenditures for MDEM increase by approximately \$50,000 in FY 2025 and \$25,000 in FY 2026, as discussed below. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	0	50,000	25,000	0	0
Net Effect	\$0	(\$50,000)	(\$25,000)	\$0	\$0

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect local government finances or operations.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: MDEM, in consultation with other interested stakeholders, must study and make recommendations regarding (1) the feasibility of establishing a WINS to notify members of the public, including recreational boaters and commercial watermen, of active waterway emergencies involving a person at risk of death or serious bodily harm, emergency marine events, or marine hazards and (2) potential partnerships between the State, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Navy, and nearby states to improve notifications to members of the public, including recreational boaters and commercial watermen, of waterway emergencies involving a person at risk of death or serious bodily harm, emergency marine events, or marine hazards.

Current Law:

Radio Equipment in Maritime Vessels

While the Department of Natural Resources is responsible for administering the State Boat Act (which is intended to foster the development, use, and enjoyment of all waters in Maryland), State law is silent on establishing requirements for maritime vessels maintaining radio equipment and monitoring specified radio frequencies in the event of emergencies.

Generally, federal law requires specified larger and working maritime vessels to have a radiotelephone capable of operation from their navigational bridges or main control stations. The radiotelephone must be capable of transmitting and receiving on the frequency or frequencies within the 156-162 Mega-Hertz band using specified classes of radio emissions.

Maryland Department of Emergency Management

Chapters 287 and 288 of 2021 established MDEM as a principal department of the Executive Branch of State government and as the successor to the Maryland Emergency Management Agency. MDEM is responsible for coordinating the State response in any major emergency or disaster. This includes supporting local governments as needed or requested and coordinating assistance with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other federal partners. MDEM manages many of the federal grants that fund a broad range of initiatives leading to enhanced protection from and responses to the full range of natural and man-made disasters that could threaten the State's citizens. Chapters 287 and 288 also transferred the Maryland 9-1-1 Board to MDEM from the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services.

Within MDEM, the Maryland Joint Operations Center (MJOC) serves as a communication hub for emergency responders statewide and supports local emergency management. MJOC also monitors local, State, national, and international events and alerts decision makers in the State when appropriate.

State Expenditures: General fund expenditures increase by approximately \$50,000 in fiscal 2025 and \$25,000 in fiscal 2026 for MDEM to hire a consultant to conduct related research, provide subject matter expertise, and develop the required reports. Actual costs may be slightly higher than this estimate, and the allocation between fiscal years may vary, depending on final contract terms. MDEM advises, and the Department of Legislative Services concurs, that MDEM cannot conduct the study with existing staff, as the department lacks the relevant expertise. Though the bill takes effect June 1, 2024, it is assumed that funds to initially hire the consultant are encumbered in fiscal 2025, so there is no effect in fiscal 2024.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years; however, legislation with similar provisions has been proposed. See SB 336 and HB 478 of 2023.

Designated Cross File: SB 166 (Senator Bailey) - Judicial Proceedings.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Emergency Management; Maryland Department of the Environment; Department of Natural Resources; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - January 18, 2024
rh/lgc Third Reader - March 14, 2024
Revised - Amendment(s) - March 14, 2024
Revised - Updated Information - March 14, 2024

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