

Chapter 503

(House Bill 1509)

AN ACT concerning

Baltimore Regional Water Governance Model Workgroup – Established

FOR the purpose of establishing the Baltimore Regional Water Governance Model Workgroup to study the regional water governance approach in the Baltimore region; and generally relating to the Baltimore Regional Water Governance Model Workgroup.

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
That:

(a) There is a Baltimore Regional Water Governance Model Workgroup.

(b) (1) The Workgroup consists of the following members:

(i) one member of the Senate of Maryland, appointed by the President of the Senate;

(ii) one member of the House of Delegates, appointed by the Speaker of the House;

(iii) two members appointed by the Governor;

(iv) five members appointed by the Mayor of Baltimore City, including:

1. one member who represents the current workforce responsible for the operation and maintenance of the water distribution system; and

2. one member from a labor organization that is the exclusive representative for Baltimore City employees;

(v) three members appointed by the County Executive of Baltimore County; and

(vi) one member from either Anne Arundel County, Carroll County, Howard County, or Harford County, appointed by the Chair of the Baltimore Metropolitan Council.

(2) Each member shall:

(i) have knowledge of:

1. water resources management and protection;
 2. the management and operation of water or wastewater systems or comparable expertise;
 3. environmental finance;
 4. human resources management; or
 5. environmental justice and equity; or
- (ii) represent ratepayers in their respective jurisdictions.

(c) The Mayor of Baltimore City and the County Executive of Baltimore County shall jointly designate a chair of the Workgroup.

(d) The Mayor of Baltimore City and the County Executive of Baltimore County shall jointly provide staff for the Workgroup.

(e) A member of the Workgroup:

- (1) may not receive compensation as a member of the Workgroup; but
- (2) is entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the Standard State Travel Regulations, as provided in the State budget.

(f) (1) The Workgroup shall strive for consensus among its members.

(2) An affirmative vote of 10 members is needed for the Workgroup to act.

(g) The Workgroup shall:

(1) review the report of the Baltimore Regional Water Governance Task Force submitted in accordance with Chapter 179 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2023;

(2) analyze the issues relevant to implementing a regional water governance model in the Baltimore region, including:

- (i) 1. developing an equity analysis to analyze how the shift to a regional water governance model affects vulnerable residents in the area; and
2. recommending programs to assist potentially affected residents during the implementation;

(ii) developing a financial transition plan to analyze how implementing a regional water governance model affects the finances of each jurisdiction within the governance area, including pension and benefit commitments and debt service;

(iii) assessing the available workforce for a regional water governance model, including hiring new employees and transitioning existing employees from Baltimore City and applicable counties to a regional water governance model;

(iv) reviewing any legal and legislative actions required for transitioning to a regional water governance model, including analyzing changes needed to the applicable city and county codes and charters; and

(v) assessing the administrative and operational changes required for implementing a regional water governance model, including whether stormwater management would fall under the purview of a regional water governance model;

(3) analyze whether creating a City–County Rate Board is necessary to:

(i) ensure fairness for consumers; and

(ii) balance city and county rates; and

(4) review the regional governance models recommended in the report of the Baltimore Regional Water Governance Task Force submitted in accordance with Chapter 179 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2023 and other existing and potential regional water and wastewater governance models to assess how different regional approaches may improve:

(i) management;

(ii) operations;

(iii) employee recruitment;

(iv) retention and training;

(v) billing and collections;

(vi) planning for capital improvements;

(vii) emergency management; and

(viii) rate stability for customers.

(h) (1) The Workgroup shall hire independent consultants to facilitate the requirements of subsection (g) of this section, including:

(i) outside counsel to assist with the analysis of issues related to regional governance; and

(ii) experts in equity analysis.

(2) For fiscal year 2026, the Governor shall include in the annual budget bill an appropriation of \$500,000 for the purpose of hiring independent consultants under paragraph (1) of this subsection.

(i) On or before June 30, 2027, the Workgroup shall report its findings to the Mayor of Baltimore City, the County Executive of Baltimore County, the Governor, and, in accordance with § 2–1257 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly.

(j) In developing the report required under subsection (i) of this section, the Workgroup:

(1) shall consult with the Office of the Attorney General and the Department of the Environment; and

(2) may not consider or make recommendations related to a privately operated regional water governance model.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect July 1, 2024. It shall remain effective for a period of 3 years and, at the end of June 30, 2027, this Act, with no further action required by the General Assembly, shall be abrogated and of no further force and effect.

Approved by the Governor, May 9, 2024.