

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 277 (Delegate Ruth, *et al.*)
Environment and Transportation

Environment - Water Bottle Filling Stations - Requirement

This bill requires, beginning October 1, 2025, that a “water bottle filling station” or a combined water bottle filling station and drinking fountain must (1) be installed in all new construction and in any building that is undergoing a renovation for which a drinking fountain is required under the current version of the International Plumbing Code (IPC) or State or local law or regulation and (2) replace a drinking fountain in an area of a building that is undergoing a renovation if the renovation includes replacing the drinking fountain. The bill’s requirements apply only prospectively and do not apply to any new construction under contract before the bill’s effective date. The Maryland Department of Labor (MD Labor) must adopt implementing regulations. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2025.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: For most State entities, the impact is expected to be minimal. However, for some State entities, such as the University System of Maryland, that own/operate several buildings with a large number of drinking fountains, the cumulative impacts on expenditures are more significant, as discussed below. MD Labor can adopt regulations with existing resources. State revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Similar to the State impact discussed above, the impact on most local governments is likely minimal. However, local expenditures may increase more significantly for some local entities that have a large number of drinking fountains, as discussed below. It is assumed that local governments can review building permits for new construction for compliance using existing resources. Local revenues are not affected. **This bill may impose a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Bill Summary: “Water bottle filling station” means a plumbing fixture connected to the potable water distribution system and sanitary drainage system that is designed and intended for filling personal use water bottles or containers at least 10 inches in height. It includes (1) a station that is separate from or integral to a drinking fountain and (2) a station that incorporates a water filter and cooling system for chilling the water.

Current Law: A county must enforce the State Plumbing Code or adopt and enforce a local plumbing code that meets or exceeds the minimum standards of the State Plumbing Code for the proper design, acceptable installation, and adequate maintenance of plumbing system. The State Plumbing Code, adopted by the State Board of Plumbing, is the 2018 IPC, although updated code versions are typically incorporated by reference in regulation every few years.

The 2024 IPC specifies the minimum number of drinking fountains required based on building classification and occupancy level. For example, educational facilities and general business facilities require one drinking fountain per 100 occupants. There is also a general minimum requirement of two drinking fountains per facility. Facilities with occupant loads less than 15 are not required to install drinking fountains.

State/Local Expenditures: Overall, it is anticipated that the costs to implement the bill for most State entities and local governments are minimal. However, for State entities and local governments that are responsible for a large number of drinking fountains, such as colleges, universities, and schools, the cumulative impacts could be more significant. Combined drinking fountains and water bottle filling stations are available for roughly \$1,400, and a standalone drinking fountain costs approximately \$700. According to the University of Maryland, College Park Campus, the required modifications to replace a standalone drinking fountain with one that includes a bottle filler cost an average of \$3,000.

According to a limited survey of State agencies and local governments, the installation of water bottle filling stations in new public construction is already fairly commonplace. Thus, the bill’s requirement to install water bottle filling stations in all new construction is not anticipated to have a significant impact on State or local finances or operations. However, it is less clear whether water bottle filling stations are being installed in existing buildings with drinking fountains when renovations are undertaken.

Small Business Effect: Similar to the impact described above for State/local governments, the impact for most small businesses is anticipated to be minimal. However, for any small businesses that must install a larger number of water bottle filling stations under the bill, costs increase more significantly. However, the IPC exemption for buildings with occupancy loads less than 15 may limit the effect on small businesses.

Any small businesses that sell, install, or maintain water bottle filling stations may realize additional business under the bill.

Additional Comments: MD Labor advises that it is unclear if the bill allows the installation of a water dispenser that is *not* connected to a potable distribution system or sanitary drainage system as a reasonable substitute for “water bottle filling stations” as defined in the bill. According to MD Labor, IPC deems water bottle filling systems that are not connected to a potable water distribution system or a sanitary drainage system as acceptable substitutes when a building occupancy load requires three or more drinking fountains to be installed. They are permitted to be substituted for up to 50% of the required number of drinking fountains.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 841 of 2024.

Designated Cross File: SB 96 (Senator Brooks) - Education, Energy, and the Environment.

Information Source(s): Harford, Montgomery, Talbot, and Wicomico counties; cities of College Park and Frostburg; Maryland Municipal League; University System of Maryland; Maryland Department of the Environment; Maryland Department of Labor; Department of Legislative Services

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