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**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the Maryland State Senate
Before the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
AFT-Maryland
March 5, 2020**

**SB 820 – Public Water System – Supplier Requirements
(Water Quality Accountability Act of 2020)**

OPPOSE

Good afternoon Mr. Chair and members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. AFT-Maryland is the State Federation for numerous public employee unions, including the City Union of Baltimore and the Baltimore County Federation of Public Employees, who work to bring vital services to residents of Baltimore City and County. On behalf of the 20,000 public sector members of the AFT-Maryland, including those who bring clean, reliable water to Marylanders in Baltimore City and Baltimore County, we strongly oppose SB 820, as it threatens to withhold state funding from systems that supply our residents with vital resources needed for survival.

Of particular concern is the section of the bill under 9-436, which states that any supplier of water may not receive public funding from any source if the supplier cannot meet the new quality standards set forth in this bill. In addition to the argument that it is not clear to us if the new standards proposed are a solution in search of a problem—that is, it is not certain that any local water system has had these problems the proposed measures are meant to correct—the question of how the residents who live in a jurisdiction whose water supplier has been penalized under what is proposed in this bill are supposed to receive water remains unanswered.

Perhaps proponents of this bill are pointing to problems experienced in Baltimore City regarding the recent cyber attack which prevented bills from going out to residents on time? If this is their argument, AFT-Maryland will point out that water service never stopped to any resident, and billing continued as normal roughly 6 weeks later. Without any public funding to help provide water to Maryland residents, as this bill proposes, water almost certainly would cease to be provided because necessary funding for maintenance will go away. Put another way, this bill is a greater threat to Marylander's receiving water than any cyber security attack could be.

Or perhaps proponents of this bill wish to punish local jurisdictions like Baltimore City whose residents have recently voted overwhelmingly to guard their water utility against privatization? With that vote, Baltimore's residents wrote into the city's charter a measure which recognized water—necessary to maintain life—is something that should not be monetized or used for profit. If this is the aim of the proponents of this bill, it should be opposed based on the fundamentals of democracy—namely the right of local residents for autonomy and self-determination with how vital community resources should be utilized.

Residents of Baltimore City will certainly point out that water bills are too high. This bill threatens to even further increase the amount Marylanders must pay to receive water at their residences. The water system which supplies potable water to people living in the city and county was built and maintained on taxpayer dollars, supplemented by residential bills based on the amount of water consumed and one's ability to pay. It is fundamentally unjust to threaten to defund a local county or municipality of such a vital resource like clean water. For these reasons, AFT-Maryland calls for an unfavorable report for SB 820. Thank you.