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Testimony in Support of
House Bill 250 - Private Well Safety Act of 2022
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
March 30, 2022

The Rural Maryland Council supports House Bill 250 as amended. This bill will ensure safe drinking water for Marylanders by creating the Well Safety Program and the Private Well Safety Fund, establishing an online private well water quality database, and requiring testing of well water during the sale of land. These provisions will provide more testing and better tracking of the drinking water in these wells, ensuring the water that Marylanders are drinking is clean and free from forms of hazardous bacteria and toxins. The increased testing will help all Marylanders, but rural Marylanders will benefit particularly because of the high usage of private wells compared to urban and suburban residents of the State.

Covering the cost of water quality testing will increase the number of residents willing to test their wells. Many Marylanders have used the same well water for years without testing to ensure that the water is safe, or they may have tested the water once and have assumed it is safe to drink since. The Maryland Department of the Environment reports that 350,000 household across the State use a private well for drinking water. It is important that these households are not using water that is polluted with bacteria or toxins that can harm the families living there. A study done by University of Maryland researchers evaluated the private well water of 118 homes in Montgomery, Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's counties, what they found was that just over 43% of the wells did not meet at least one of the federal health-based drinking water standards. Some of the bacteria and toxins found in the wells were coliforms, fecal coliforms, enterococci, and escherichia coli.

One of the most dangerous toxins that can infiltrate wells is nitrate. The same study by University of Maryland researchers found that 3.4% of the wells tested contained nitrate levels above the drinking water standard of 10mg/L. High nitrate levels can cause health problems such as cancer and can be harmful or even fatal to infants if drank by the mother while pregnant. Since nitrate cannot be tasted or smelled in water, families may be drinking contaminated water with no way of knowing. This is why it is important to provide the necessary resources for families to test and track the quality of their drinking water.

Rural Marylanders are more likely to use private well water than those in suburban and urban parts of the State. HB-250 will help keep wells clean and protect those who drink water from private wells. The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of House Bill 250.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.

"A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland"