



Testimony in Support of House Bill 250– Private Well Safety Act of 2022

House Environment and Transportation Committee: February 2, 2022

January 31, 2022

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony **in support of HB250 – Private Well Safety Act of 2022** - on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland’s Eastern Shore with over 2,000 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration and education. ShoreRivers believes that access for all communities to clean water is an essential right, and **what could be more essential than clean, safe, drinking water?**

As a riverkeeper, I research and collect water quality data including nitrogen, phosphorus, and fecal enterococci bacteria levels and communicate it to communities within my watershed. I am committed to providing this information so that individuals and families can make informed decisions about swimming or recreating in their local waterways. **The establishment of an accessible online database of well water quality results would allow riverkeepers and other water advocacy organizations to connect their local communities to transparent, credible data about the ground water they drink.**

As an advocate for the Chester River, I work primarily with the residents of Kent and Queen Anne’s County, two of the most agricultural counties in Maryland. Their intensely rural landscapes and sparsely set subdivisions mean that large percentages of the population are not connected to town utilities, and are reliant on well water. Many residents have never tested their water supply beyond what was required to build the well, leaving them and future residents at risk of ingesting coliform bacteria, harmful nitrates, and chemical runoff associated with agricultural practices. An MDE report from 2013 states that, “Nitrate pollution in groundwater is becoming increasingly problematic, [...] Due to agricultural land use practices, nitrate concentrations in shallow waters of unconfined Coastal Plain aquifers on Maryland’s Eastern Shore commonly exceed the Federal Drinking Water Standard.”¹ The 2021 report indicates that not much has changed. **Requiring water quality testing during the sale of a home with a well will at minimum, increase data available through the state’s online portal, and protect new homeowners from buying a home with contaminated and harmful water.**

¹ Maryland Department of the Environment. *Groundwater Protection Program Annual Report to the Maryland General Assembly 2013*. July 2013. Available at https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/Water/water_supply/Source_Water_Assessment_Program/Documents/FINAL_GWR%20report_1_2013%203_.pdf.

Within my watershed, it is often disadvantaged and underserved BIPOC communities who have the greatest risk of living with contaminated well water. This is a result of occupying land that is disproportionately burdened with environmental hazards. **Requiring MDE to establish a Private Well Safety Program will provide eligible residents with financial assistance to cover the costs associated with water test kits, and provide the opportunity for residents to remediate their wells when unsafe levels of contamination are found.**

The Private Well Safety Act of 2022 will establish common sense protections to support private well owners and lower-income families who may bear a disproportionate burden from unsafe drinking water. For these reasons and the examples described above, ShoreRivers urges the committee to adopt **House Bill 250**.

Sincerely,
Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper on behalf of:

ShoreRivers

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