



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB248**

Testimony by Delegate Vaughn Stewart

February 2nd, 2022 • Environment and Transportation Committee

**What the Bill Does:**

Legionnaires' disease is a severe and often deadly form of pneumonia caused by a bacterium known as *Legionella pneumophila*. People can get sick when they breathe in small droplets of water or accidentally swallow water containing *Legionella* into their lungs. Signs and symptoms of the disease include cough, shortness of breath, high fever, muscle pains, and headaches. The most common route to exposure stems from the bacteria contaminating hot water tanks, hot tubs, and cooling towers of large air conditioners. The only way to prevent Legionnaires' disease is the proper maintenance of water systems.

HB248 would require publicly owned, leased, or managed building personnel to implement water management plans to prevent the growth and spread of *Legionella pneumophila* bacteria in their water systems in order to reduce the risk of Legionnaires' disease. The water management plans must be consistent with the internationally recognized standard, ASHRAE 188. This ANSI accredited standard was developed by CDC, EPA, Veterans Administration, and many other subject matter experts as the best practices to reduce the risk of Legionnaires' disease in building water systems.

**Why the Bill is Important:**

Cases of Legionnaires' disease are on the rise across the United States, and the disease is extremely deadly. The CDC reported an 800% increase of the disease since 2006, even before the onset of COVID-19. In Maryland, cases have doubled in recent years. The National Academies of Science, Engineering & Medicine estimates that the mortality rate for Legionnaires' death is as high as 33%. Those who survive are often left with debilitating health issues and long-term disabilities. Legionnaires' disease can impact anyone, but individuals who are over 50, past and current smokers, those with COPD and especially anyone with a compromised respiratory system face particular risk. As we know, social determinants of health for individuals from under-resourced communities are over-represented in this high-risk category.

The COVID pandemic has heightened the seriousness of Legionnaires' disease in two ways. First, the nearly 1 million Marylanders who have recovered from COVID are at heightened risk of hospitalization and death from Legionnaires'. Second, the pandemic has changed water use in our buildings. Frequent and often prolonged unplanned building closures, lower occupancy and fewer staff on-site mean a much higher chance of water that is completely stagnant or without sufficient levels of disinfectant, creating ideal breeding grounds for the deadly *L. pneumophila* bacteria and increased risk for those exposed through showers, fountains, misters, taps, cooling towers and other ways that water becomes aerosolized.

**Why the Committee Should Vote Favorably:**

About 90% of Legionnaires' disease hospitalizations and deaths could have been prevented with effective water management plans. This bill will dramatically decrease the risk of Marylanders contracting this deadly illness from breathing in contaminated air while working in, living in, or visiting public buildings. And it's especially important as we emerge from the pandemic.

The CDC has encouraged building owners and operators to adopt the ASHRAE 188 Standard since 2015, and yet buildings with water management plans are few and far between. HB248 will ensure our state government takes simple, cost-effective steps to limit sickness and death from a preventable disease.

I urge a favorable report.