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ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Delegate Dana Stein in Support of

HB 318 Environment – On- Site Wastewater Services - Regulation

Chairman Barve and Committee members:

This is a re-introduction of last year's HB 302, which this committee and the full House approved. I am pleased to say that this year it is also cross-filed by Sen. Katie Hester.

As this committee knows well, on-site wastewater systems, or septic systems, are a home's most expensive appliance. Over 420,000 homes in Maryland have septic systems. The problem is that this appliance is underground. So any problem with design, installation, and/or maintenance can hide for years at a time. This means a system that is supposed to clean household sewage could be contaminating the ground, wells, or nearby streams or about to erupt onto the lawn or into a basement.

Given the cost and importance of septic systems, it is critical that the people who design, install, maintain, and repair them are properly trained.

Stories abound about problems that occur when the system is not well designed, installed, or maintained. These problems can be very expensive and complicated to fix.

This bill comes from a group made up of members of the septic system industry and environmental organizations. They have worked over several years on this legislation seeking advice from the industry, environmental health officers, and environmental leaders. Over the summer another round of meetings hosted by me, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), and Sen. Hester brought many people together to look at issues on this topic.

We made a few changes to this year's bill. We simplified the membership of the On-Site Waste Water Board. The bill still requires geographic diversity but it is now

easier to populate the board. Also, we made MDE's designee a non-voting member and not held to the term limits of other members.

The purpose of the bill remains the same. HB 318 will bring much-needed standards and accountability to the septic industry by creating a board to oversee the licensing procedures for people in the industry, such as installers, designers, property transfer inspectors, operations and maintenance providers, and pumpers.

HB 318 will ensure that:

- Homeowners and buyers are protected from poorly trained contractors.
- The systems are designed and built to quality standards.
- Property values are protected by keeping these systems in good repair.
- The septic system industry will have clear and consistent standards across the state.
- A clear path for entering this industry will now be available.

The board established by HB 318 is just like the licensing boards for plumbers, electricians, well drillers, and other trade professionals. It is interesting to note that every other trade involved in building a home has a governing board. It is time for that same level of protection to be applied to the septic industry.

What will this board do? The board has the authority to set reasonable fees for issuing and renewing licenses, and these fees will be used to maintain the board's functions. It will also develop certifications and qualifications for other professionals including designers, advance treatment installers, and drip installers.

The board will have nine members, at least six of whom are on-site wastewater professionals, two of whom are consumer members, and one represents MDE. These members will have geographic distribution. The board will also have the authority to deny, reprimand, suspend, or revoke a license through provisions in this bill. It will also have the authority to impose a fine for violations.

Counties of course retain the ability to adopt more rigorous standards than those imposed by the state board if they wish.

The board will ensure that this industry has the training, continuing education, and standards to ensure that Maryland health and environment are protected, and that homeowners and new buyers can be assured that their home is healthy and safe.

Testifying today are several representatives from the Septic or Onsite Wastewater industry and the environmental community.