



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education

House Bill 250

Private Well Safety Act of 2022

Date: February 2, 2022

Position: **Support**

To: Environment and Transportation Committee

From: Doug Myers, Maryland Senior Scientist

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** HB 250 which establishes a grant program for counties and individuals to support water quality testing of drinking water wells and a requirement to test wells when property is sold to a new owner, or a new well is created. The bill also requires MDE to identify hot spots for drinking water contamination, when 50% or more of wells in a particular area exceed any limits for safe drinking water.

CBF understands that the required groundwater testing includes testing for nitrates as part of the potability standard. Common sources of nitrate include excess application of manure and fertilizer to fields, as well as septic system drainage. CBF has particular concern about contaminants in groundwater reaching surface waters, especially if contaminants like nitrates are impairing surface waters. Groundwater has been found to be a source of nitrates in the Bay.¹

Nitrates are a form of nitrogen. Excess nitrogen pollution in the Bay feeds algal blooms that block sunlight to underwater grasses and suck up life supporting oxygen when they die and decompose. These resulting "dead zones" of low or no oxygen can stress and even kill fish and shellfish. Algal blooms can also trigger spikes in pH levels, stressing fish, and create conditions that spur the growth of parasites.

With this bill's requirement for all well data to be uploaded to a database available to the public in summarized form for each county, CBF could access the data to inform environmental work, especially by obtaining information on nitrates in groundwater within zip codes with close proximity to tidal waters.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 250. For more information, please contact Robin Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney at rclark@cbf.org and 443.995.8753.

¹ [Factors Affecting Nitrate Concentrations in Stream Base Flow](#), Susan A. Wherry, Anthony J. Tesoriero, and Silvia Terziotti, *Environmental Science & Technology* 2021 55 (2), 902-911, DOI: 10.1021/acs.est.0c02495

Maryland Office • Philip Merrill Environmental Center • 6 Herndon Avenue • Annapolis • Maryland • 21403
Phone (410) 268-8816 • Fax (410) 280-3513