

WKC_ SB 513 Favorable Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Alexander Villazon

Position: FAV



P.O. Box 11075
Takoma Park, MD 20913-1075
info@waterkeeperschesapeake.org
https://waterkeeperschesapeake.org
(800) 995-6755

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 513–Environment – Collection and Reporting of Drinking Water and Wastewater Data and Information – Requirements

February 23, 2023

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **SB513** on behalf of Waterkeepers Chesapeake and organizations listed below. Waterkeepers Chesapeake is a coalition of seventeen Waterkeepers, Riverkeepers, and Coastkeepers working to make the waters of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays swimmable and fishable. As Waterkeepers work to protect and maintain the ability of the public to safely enjoy the waters of our State, we advocate for transparency when it comes to Marylanders having access to data related to the safety and quality of their drinking water sources. We believe **SB513** will help in reaching this level of transparency and allowing community members to be more involved in their local water issues.

What this bill does:

SB513 will require the Maryland Department of the Environment to create, operate, and maintain an Open Water Data Reporting Platform that (1) makes available to the **public data related to the drinking water** and wastewater services in the State; (2) improves the **equitable provision** of these services; (3) brings **transparency to water access** and the provision of drinking water and wastewater services in the State; and (4) enables **more inclusive participation of residents** in the provision of drinking water and wastewater services and the protection of water resources. This bill would effectively help bridge the gap between communities when it comes to data access as not only does it make the data available but it enables community members to be more included when it comes to their communities' water resources thus helping prevent contamination.

The Department of Legislative Services notes that MDE can partner with an existing nonprofit organization or a State agency to create, operate, or maintain this platform. We believe this is also a crucial step towards enabling communities to be more involved as although water quality data may be available, lack of access or resources can hinder community members from being able to reach this data. By allowing MDE to partner with organizations dedicated to helping bridge gaps in accessibility and inclusivity with local communities, **SB513** will make its platform more easily accessible.

What this bill means for Waterkeepers -

Waterkeepers across the Chesapeake research and collect water quality data and communicate their findings to communities within their watersheds so that individuals and families can make informed decisions about recreating in their local waterways. **The establishment of an accessible online database of municipal wastewater and drinking water would allow Waterkeepers to connect their local communities to transparent, credible data about the water they drink, and the conditions of their local wastewater facilities.**

For these reasons stated above, we urge the Committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE** report on **SB 513**.

Sincerely,

Waterkeepers Chesapeake
Assateague Coastal Trust
Blue Water Baltimore
Gunpowder Riverkeeper
Patuxent Riverkeeper
Potomac Riverkeeper Network
ShoreRivers

SB 513 - Collection and Reporting of Drinking Water

Uploaded by: Casey Hunter

Position: FAV

February 23, 2023

Testimony on SB 513

**Environment – Collection and Reporting of Drinking Water and Wastewater Data and Information - Requirements
Education, Energy, and the Environment**

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 513, which would increase transparency in the provision of drinking water and wastewater services in Maryland by requiring certain data and information to be reported, and for those reports to be maintained virtually for public access.

Drinking water and wastewater utilities provide core public services to the citizens of Maryland, yet Marylanders have little to no choice in selecting the provider. As it stands, Marylanders also have a very limited availability to access critical data and information regarding the services they are paying for. SB 513 would require water and wastewater utilities to give consumers a clear picture of exactly what they are paying for and hold water utilities accountable to their consumers. The data collected under SB 513 would also enable the State to evaluate how equitable the provision of drinking water and wastewater services is in Maryland, which would ensure that all communities in the State are being provided with the same standard of service.

Common Cause Maryland strongly supports transparency and accessibility at all levels of government and service. SB 513 would work to introduce transparency into the provision of drinking water and wastewater services.

We strongly urge a favorable report.

CLA Testimony SB 513.pdf

Uploaded by: Evan Isaacson

Position: FAV



Support for Senate Bill 513

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Committee:

The Chesapeake Legal Alliance supports SB 513 because transparency and access to data are the first steps to addressing many of the larger and more systemic obstacles to delivering clean water. Without adequate data we cannot understand the full extent of our water problems, much less offer the right solutions. Access to clean water is a human right, but is certainly not treated as such right now. Water quality in the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays and throughout Maryland are still nowhere near restored but we do not understand why. Basic questions abound:

- ❖ How many low income households in Maryland are deprived of something as fundamentally important as clean and safe drinking water?
- ❖ How many households in Maryland still lack basic 20th century sanitation services, a problem still tragically prevalent in some southern states?
- ❖ How much would it cost to end the inhumane practice of shutting off a family's water?
- ❖ What are the social, economic, and environmental consequences of budgeting for water differently than all of the other basic and critical municipal services (e.g., taxes)?
- ❖ How many homes are taking full advantage of low income assistance programs or hardship exemptions? Where do we need to target outreach to help these individuals?
- ❖ Why do some communities seem to have less success accessing state and federal grants?
- ❖ What percentage of utility revenues come from ratepayers versus other local, state, or federal sources and how does that vary?
- ❖ Why are some municipalities experiencing water supply shortages in a state with an overabundance of precipitation?
- ❖ Why are our smart growth laws seemingly ineffective at stimulating smart development in places where infrastructure exists and keeping it away from remaining natural areas?
- ❖ How do major wastewater treatment plants suddenly fall apart? Is there a way to track whether owners and operators of utilities are keeping up with capital upgrades?
- ❖ Where can infrastructure extension and expansion projects do the most good for public health and water quality?
- ❖ If we wanted to invest in providing safer domestic water supplies for Maryland's lowest income households, how much would that cost and where should we target these efforts?
- ❖ How many utilities are owned by private equity? What are the trends and consequences?

This is just a fraction of important questions that deserve answers. But without data these questions will go unanswered for the policymakers and budget analysts who need much more information to help Marylanders and our environment achieve our clean water goals and needs. This is why we support SB 513. For more information, you may reach Evan Isaacson at evan@chesapeakelegal.org.

EnvironmentalPolicyInnovationCenter_SB-513_Testimo

Uploaded by: Gabriel Watson

Position: FAV

February 22, 2023

Position: Favorable

The Environmental Policy Innovation Center (EPIC) supports Maryland Senate Bill SB-513 sponsored by Senator Clarence K. Lam of Maryland's 12th District.

SB-513 addresses the critical need for publicly available drinking water and wastewater data. With the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, \$844 million are available over the next five years to improve Maryland's water infrastructure. SB-513 falls squarely in line with federal funding directives to replace lead pipes and bolster water infrastructure for climate resiliency and equity. The passage of this legislation will bring transparency to water access, and give Maryland residents an avenue to participate in both the provision and protection of their water services.

Further than requiring data collection, SB-513 mandates the data be made publicly available through the Open Water Data Reporting Platform. EPIC believes publicly available data is the bedrock of a functioning modern democracy. Here, access to data will enable accountability, project-level civic involvement, and incorporation with existing tools like MD EJScreen and MDE EJ Screening Tool (both of which currently lack data on drinking water and wastewater treatment). This access would allow Maryland to implement equitable decision making, aligning with federally mandated Justice40 goals.

Beyond immediate use for Marylanders, data components required in SB-513 serve a larger mission of understanding our nation's drinking and wastewater infrastructure. By producing high-quality and interoperable data, Maryland will join the growing chorus of states contributing to regional and national datasets. Provisional datasets like the [Service Area Boundaries dataset](#), developed by EPIC, SimpleLab, and The Internet of Water serve as a starting point for states without this data. The national map is strengthened when states collate and publicly reveal data from utilities. SB-513 explicitly requires the reporting of water utility boundaries and will bring Maryland inline with the efforts of 17 other states like Pennsylvania and New Jersey who maintain comprehensive boundary datasets. EPIC is devoted to water infrastructure equity and we detail the policy, process and use cases of states developing service area boundary datasets in an online [resource](#).

While EPIC supports the Bill without amendments, we recommend you consider the following aspects with respect to the Open Water Data Portal, and the reporting requirements of utilities and Maryland Department of the Environment ("the Department").

1. Open Water Data Portal

While some of the data may be difficult for utilities to provide, we believe having a digital map showing where one water system begins and another ends is the basis of coordinated water infrastructure decision making.

In keeping with [FAIR](#) data standards and progress the Department has made in revealing water discharge permit data to the public through the Maryland Open Data Portal, EPIC recommends the Open Water Data Reporting Platform employ these features:

- Open source GIS file of service area boundary, such as GeoJSON or GeoPackage;
- Robust and up-to-date metadata, see specific recommendations on components [here](#);
- Programmatic access through an Application Programming Interface (API);
- Connections to Maryland Open Data Portal and other relevant government portals;
- Thorough and ongoing community involvement in Portal development including usability, accessibility, and use-case validation.

2. Cost and Time Consideration

Knowing some of the data and information requested will be difficult to collect and share for many utilities inexperienced in doing so, we encourage this effort to proceed with sensitivity so as not to overburden already limited-capacity utilities or the Department, EPIC recommends the Bill incorporate the following changes:

- Limit the submission frequency to annually for all types of data and information requested for the first five years of the project, and;
- Keep all data and information collected interoperable and machine readable to promote robust data pipelines that will limit duplicative efforts.
- Evaluate existing open-source solutions for data collection and standardization.

EPIC estimates the cost of service area boundary development between \$150 and \$300 per water system from outreach to a set of public standardized maps. With 405 community water systems, Maryland's development cost-burden is roughly \$60,750 - \$121,500. Beyond initial development, the maintenance cost depends on the frequency of boundary updates and the ability to integrate with other programs, such as sanitary surveys.

We applaud the foresight in allocating additional funding to the Department for FY2024 to implement this Bill. Furthermore, we recommend a portion of the increase be used to create two additional positions focused on water-related data and supporting technology.

In closing, EPIC and its partners SimpleLab and Dr. Allison Lassister, University of Pennsylvania, applaud Senator Lam and the Maryland Senate for advancing legislation that builds equity through the application of environmental data and technologies. We support SB-513 without amendments, and respectfully request that this committee provide SB-513 with a favorable report.

With respect and appreciation,
Environmental Policy Innovation Center

Testimony in Support of SB0513.pdf

Uploaded by: J Gibbons

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB0513

I write to offer my full support for SB0513. I believe that with the creation of an Open Water Data Reporting Platform that this Bill proposes, there will be greater transparency and accountability around water and wastewater service provision, water arrearages, water shutoffs, etc. This kind of transparency is sorely needed in order to address the inequities that exist in the system that lead to the “accessibility trap” as highlighted by The Center for Water Security and Cooperation.

The reality is that the cost to provide clean water has risen faster than personal income for many years. Statistics show that nationally between 2008 and 2014, residential rates for water and wastewater increased by 41 percent and 37 percent, respectively and from 2002 to 2016, the annual service charge for clean water services doubled from \$239 to \$479. These increases actually outpaced the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for this same period. The CPI rose by 33 percent. Maryland mirrors these figures. Low income residents are particularly vulnerable to adverse outcomes due to these rapidly rising costs, with little to no relief available.

Law, primarily local law, governs access to drinking water. And for low income families, already at greater risk for non-payment of bills, these laws often result in persistent periods of loss of access to clean drinking water. I am convinced that the specific provisions of SB0513 e.g. the 55 enumerated items that must be included in the platform, disaggregation of the data by nine-digit zip code, etc. will lead to responsive changes that fully address the current challenges and end the accessibility trap.

SB0513 MD_PolicyLink Written Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Katy Lackey

Position: FAV

SB0513, introduced by Senator Lam, is an important step in transparency, accountability, and more equitable infrastructure services for Maryland's communities. The bill will provide open data on key aspects of water/wastewater utility operations, including water shutoffs, water shutoff notices, and water arrearages. Making this data available monthly or annually (depending on utility size) will help to identify gaps in infrastructure coverage, services, and affordability. This is particularly important in repairing past harms in low-income and communities of color (where water shutoffs are most prevalent) and ensuring better practices for more equitable outcomes moving forward. In fact, race is a strong predictor of whether communities in the United States have adequate and reliable access to affordable, clean water and wastewater services. Transparent data is key for building equitable solutions with the 100+ frontline organizations and allies we work with on water issues across the country, and for so many more communities in the United States. We hope the passage of this bill can serve as a national example for water data collection bills across the nation and help move from water assistance to true water affordability.

Katy Lackey
Senior Associate, Water Equity & Climate Resilience
PolicyLink
katy@policylink.org
www.policylink.org
www.climatewaterequity.org

Letter in Support to MD Leg, SB 513.pdf

Uploaded by: Sheela Lal

Position: FAV

February 21, 2023

Dear Sen. Feldman, Chair of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee:

I am writing on behalf of BlueConduit in support of SB0513, which will be heard in your committee on Thursday, February 23, 2023.

SB0513 calls for a statewide open data platform focused on water quality data. SB-0153 falls squarely in line with federal funding directives. The passage of this legislation is paramount for ensuring equitable and efficient resource allocation, bringing transparency to water access, and allowing Maryland residents an avenue to participate in both the provision and protection of water services.

SB0513 mandates the data be made publicly available through the Open Water Data Reporting Platform. Here, access to data will enable accountability, civil involvement at project-level, and incorporation with existing tools like MD EJScreen and MDE EJ Screening Tool which lack data on drinking and wastewater, and enables Maryland to implement equitable decision making and alignment with federally mandated Justice40 goals.

While the EPA regulations require all water systems to provide a publicly accessible full service line inventory on both the public and private side of the water line, and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) provides funding to replace lead service lines, there is no regulatory framework to ensure these federal programs work concurrently. SB0513 creates a future use case for the water quality data Maryland's Department of the Environment will start receiving via the Lead and Copper Rule inventories from water systems across the state.

BlueConduit, the pioneer in using predictive modeling to locate and map lead service lines, applauds the intent of the bill. Our work is rooted in good data, public health, and transparent communication to all stakeholders; it is rare to see legislation attempting to codify these values in state programming.

BlueConduit serves over 100 water systems in using predictive modeling to reduce the number of unknown service line materials, convert this data into public facing maps, and think about using their water data to build good relationships with their consumers. BlueConduit continues to see the value of strategic investments in data programs to effectively communicate and report on highly sensitive public health issues.

If you would like to hear more about BlueConduit and our success across the United States and Canada, please don't hesitate to contact Sheela Lal at sheela@blueconduit.com. We would be happy to provide thought leadership or testimony on such matters.

We encourage the committee to vote "yea" on this bill.

NAACP MSC SB0513 Collection and Reporting of Drink

Uploaded by: Staci Hartwell

Position: FAV



February 21, 2023

Committee | Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment

Bill | **SB0513** - Collection and Reporting of Drinking Water and Wastewater Data and Information

Position | Favorable

Hearing | February 23, 2023

Dear Chairman Feldman and Distinguished Committee Members,

On behalf of the NAACP Maryland State Conference, I am submitting this testimony in support of SB0513, *Collection and Reporting of Drinking Water and Wastewater Data and Information*.

Utility insecurity is a major issue for Black and Brown communities, as compared to White communities. Over 50% of Black Americans and 45% of Hispanics experience utility insecurity, compared to 25% of White households (with a median of approximately 32% of households).¹ One in three U S Households face some form of utility insecurity.² One in five households reduced or forewent necessities, like food and medicine, to pay a utility bill.³ It is with the above data, we are able to identify and track areas of concern and opportunities to support overburdened and underserved communities in line with the tenants of the *Justice 40 Initiative*.

Good data is at the root of responsible decision-making. To ensure a *just* utility system, we must verify policies and practices “track with reality,” to benefit communities that bear the disproportionate impacts of climate change. It is the *data* that enables us to establish baselines to measure and track the impact of policies and practices and if we are in alignment with our desired outcomes. Data also helps to forecast and avoid any major issues which may have a negative impact on consumers. An open Water Data Reporting Platform enables us to access real-time, accurate data which helps us achieve the goals outlined in the *Justice 40 Initiative*.

This bill will require the collection and centralized publication of data that shows the financial, resource, and community health of water and wastewater systems in Maryland. By having real-time and historic data on water consumption, policy, practices, and programs, we will be able to:

- Make provisions for low-income families and overburdened and underserved communities in the case of shut-offs, late payments, liens, and the inability to pay.
- Better inform the public on available assistance programs.
- Identify access gaps and other weak points so the State can better tailor assistance.

¹US Energy Information Administration Residential Energy Consumption Survey, 2015

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

- Empower communities with information, so they may participate by lending their informed voice to utility decisions.

This bill buttresses the *Climate Solutions Now Act* by driving the work needed to develop and advance policy to reduce environmental injustices. For the reasons listed above, we strongly urge a favorable report on SB0513.

Respectfully submitted,



Staci R. Hartwell, Chair
NAACP Maryland State Conference
Environmental and Climate Justice Committee
8775 Cloudleap Court, Suite 200
Columbia, Maryland 21045

SB 513 - UNF - MML.pdf

Uploaded by: Angelica Bailey

Position: UNF



Maryland Municipal League

The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

TESTIMONY

February 23, 2023

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Bill: SB 513 – Environment – Collection and Reporting of Drinking Water and Wastewater Data and Information – Requirements

Position: Oppose

Reason for Position:

The Maryland Municipal League opposes SB 513, requires the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to create, operate, and maintain a statewide Open Water Data Reporting Platform to make drinking water and wastewater service information publicly available.

This is a laudable goal, but this measure requires every Maryland water utility to provide MDE with extensive detailed data and information; in fact, the list of requirements in this legislation is over 5 pages long. MML's membership includes over 70 municipal water providers and over 60 municipal sewer providers, all with different financial resources and staffing levels. Our municipal water utilities simply do not have the capacity to comply with the onerous requirements proposed in this legislation.

For these reasons, the League respectfully requests that this committee provide SB 513 with an unfavorable report.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Theresa Kuhns	Chief Executive Officer
Angelica Bailey Thupari, Esq.	Director, Advocacy & Public Affairs
Bill Jorch	Director, Public Policy
Justin Fiore	Deputy Director, Advocacy & Public Affairs

1212 West Street, Annapolis, Maryland 21401

410-268-5514 | 800-492-7121 | FAX: 410-268-7004 | www.mdmunicipal.org

Munissb513_Unfav.pdf

Uploaded by: Brett Lininger

Position: UNF

Municipally Owned Utilities

Testimony for Senate Bill 513

Environment – Collection and Reporting of Drinking Water and Wastewater Data and Information – Requirements

Position: Oppose

Dear Chairman Feldman and the Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of the Municipally owned utilities (“Munis”) in Maryland, comprised of the towns of Easton, Hagerstown, Williamsport, Berlin, and Thurmont.

The Munis oppose SB 513, which requires the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to create, operate, and maintain a statewide Open Water Data Reporting Platform to make drinking water and wastewater service information publicly available.

While this legislation is well intended, the Munis simply do not have the ability to meet the long list of requirements proposed therein. Each of the Munis have limited financial resources and personnel.

For these reasons, the Munis respectfully request that this committee provide SB 513 with an unfavorable report.

Sincerely,

Brett Lininger

443-527-4837

brett@kresshammen.com

SB0513-EEE_MACo_OPP.pdf

Uploaded by: Dominic Butchko

Position: UNF



Senate Bill 513

Environment – Collection and Reporting of Drinking Water and Wastewater Data and Information – Requirements

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Education, Energy, the Environment
Committee

Date: February 23, 2023

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 513. This bill would require counties that operate water utilities to provide the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) with detailed customer, system, and financial data on a monthly or annual basis for inclusion in a public database. This legislation is a burdensome mandate and could pose significant ratepayer cost increases without materially promoting better service.

Counties fully embrace the idea of transparency. Public water system users already have various ways to raise concerns about service and rates, including directly to their locally elected officials.

SB 513 imposes an arbitrary and burdensome mandate on counties, requiring no fewer than 55 points of information and empowers MDE to go even further and enumerate additional data points at their discretion. The Maryland Association of Municipal Wastewater Agencies – the association representing the vast majority of wastewater systems in Maryland – points out that many of these data points are duplicative, unnecessary, and/or not within the purview of a water utility to aggregate.

Additionally, many counties project that should this reporting requirement be implemented, they would have to dedicate at least one full-time staff person, if not more, to fulfill the requirements of this bill. Water systems are already facing difficulty with recruiting and retaining staff. This arbitrary and burdensome report only serves to further stretch already constrained time and resources – and would surely lead to higher ratepayer costs.

While counties agree with the overarching intent of SB 513, this bill prescribes arbitrary and unrealistic reporting requirements with a questionable end result. For these reasons, MACo **OPPOSES** SB 513 and urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report.

MAMWA Ltr SB 513.pdf

Uploaded by: Lisa Ochsenhirt

Position: UNF



Maryland Association of Municipal Wastewater Agencies, Inc.

Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission

14501 Sweitzer Lane, 7th Floor

Laurel, MD 20707

Tel: 301-206-7008

February 22, 2023

MEMBER AGENCIES

Allegany County
Anne Arundel County
City of Baltimore
Baltimore County
Town of Berlin
Cecil County
Charles County
City of Cumberland
D.C. Water
Frederick County
City of Hagerstown
Harford County
City of Havre de Grace
Howard County
Ocean City
Pocomoke City
Queen Anne's County
City of Salisbury
Somerset County Sanitary District
St. Mary's Metro. Comm.
Washington County
WSSC Water

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: OPPOSE -- SB 513 (Collection and Reporting of Drinking Water and Wastewater Data and Information - Requirements)

Dear Chairman Feldman:

On behalf of the Maryland Association of Municipal Wastewater Agencies (MAMWA), I am writing to convey MAMWA's **opposition** to SB 513, which would require that a water utility provide the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) with detailed customer, system, and financial data on a monthly or annual basis for inclusion on a public database. MAMWA is a statewide association of local governments and wastewater treatment agencies that serve approximately 95% of the State's sewered population. Many Members also operate public water systems.

CONSULTANT MEMBERS

Black & Veatch
GHD Inc.
Greeley and Hansen Engineers
Hazen & Sawyer
HDR Engineering, Inc.
Jacobs
Ramboll Americas
Whitman, Requardt & Assoc.
Xylem, Inc.

GENERAL COUNSEL

AquaLaw PLC

SB 513 includes a list of 55 data points for submission. Some data points raise serious public safety concerns. For example, the bill would require that a utility provide a "map and a detailed description of service area boundaries of the water utility." MAMWA Members are concerned that putting maps on the internet would increase the risk of potential harm from bad actors. Some data points may be impossible to pull together. For example, it is unclear how a water utility would know how many vacant homes there are in the service area that receive a water bill short of knocking on individual doors. Some data points are duplicative. MAMWA Members are already providing certain operational and distribution data to MDE. Some data points are of uncertain value. MAMWA questions whether the public is interested in the amount of energy used to provide drinking water or wastewater services. Taken together, gathering all 55 data points would be highly burdensome for large and small systems alike. MAMWA Members have shared that they may need to hire an employee or employees just to manage these data submissions. For all these reasons, **MAMWA urges the Committee to vote "NO" on SB 513.** Please feel free to contact me with any questions at Lisa@AquaLaw.com or 804-716-9021.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Ochsenhirt, MAMWA Deputy General Counsel

cc: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee Members, SB 513 Sponsor

SB0513 LOI.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Tyler Abbott

Position: INFO



February 23, 2023

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Miller Senate Building, 2 West
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Senate Bill 513 – Environment – Collection and Reporting of Drinking Water and Wastewater Data and Information – Requirements

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE or Department) has reviewed Senate Bill 513 and would like to share some information. MDE has met with bill sponsor regarding our concerns and working to provide amendments.

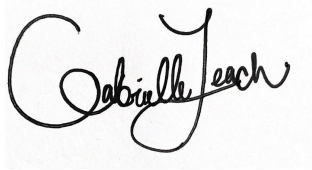
Senate Bill 513 require the Department to collect and publish certain information online from water and wastewater utilities through a new protocol, require those entities to provide updated information on a specified basis, prescribe civil penalties for non-compliance, mandate an ongoing process of public comment, and establish annual reporting obligations for the Department to respond to comments and analyze the extensive data collected under the Bill, and provide a report to the Governor and the General Assembly every October beginning in 2024. Senate Bill 513 would establish a vast, new reporting obligation for water and wastewater utilities State-wide and mandate a voluminous database for the Department to establish, operate, maintain, and analyze on an ongoing basis, representing a large commitment of resources from the Department.

Most of the information required by SB 513 is not currently being reported to the Department. In order to fulfill these requirements, the Department will require a significant amount of additional staffing for outreach to water utilities (there are currently 3,236 water utilities in Maryland), development of database parameters, development of self-reporting forms, IT support, reviewing submissions, and determining compliance. While the large utilities (Maryland has 33 large water utilities) will have some or most of this information available. The remaining 3,205 small water utilities will likely be compiling most of the information for the first time.

The definition of water utility combines public or private entities that provide wastewater services to customers within a service area. The difference between a small utility and large utility is based on the number of customers. The Department currently does not issue wastewater permits based on that criteria. Staff will need to reach out to all wastewater permittees to determine applicability and amend permits to include the requirements of this bill. Additional professional staff, administrative staff and IT staff will be required for the wastewater permits division to implement the legislation.

Thank you for considering the Department's information regarding this legislation. We will continue to monitor SB 513 during the Committee's deliberations, and I am available to answer any questions you may have. Please feel free to contact me at 410-453-3235 or by e-mail at Gabrielle.Leach@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gabrielle Leach". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'G' and 'L'.

Gabrielle Leach
Deputy Director
Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs

Cc: The Honorable Clarence Lam