

SB883_letter.pdf

Uploaded by: Anne Palmer

Position: FAV

March 14, 2023

2023 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY

S.B. 883 Environment - Water Utilities - Shutoff Protections (Water Access for All Protection Act)

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment

POSITION: Testimony of Support of Senate Bill 883

BILL ANALYSIS: Authorizes a water utility to temporarily shut off service for reasons of health or safety or in a State or national emergency; prohibits a water utility from shutting off service for certain reasons and/or on receipt of certain information; and prohibits the sale of property solely to enforce a lien imposed for unpaid water, sewer, or sanitary system charges, fees, or assessments.

SIGNED: Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FRSC)

Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement is for the record **in SUPPORT of S.B. 883**. I am submitting this letter on behalf of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC), and it does not necessarily represent the views of the State of Maryland. The Maryland General Assembly established the FSRC in the 2021 legislative session to bring together 33 appointed council members from across the state, all with different points of entry and expertise, to work toward a common goal of a more resilient food system and address the food insecurity crisis due to COVID-19. One of the key mandates of this council was to develop equitable and sustainable policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the Maryland food system.

The FSRC believes this legislation will advance several of our priority goals, including:

- Address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic crisis
- Develop equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system;

Access to safe water for cooking and drinking is essential to the nutrition security of all people. S.B. 883 protects essential access to residential water for some of our state's most at-risk residents, older adults 65+ with lower incomes, and those with certain medical conditions and impairments.

As outlined in the FSRC's 2021 report to the Maryland General Assembly: prior to COVID-19's impact on Maryland, an estimated 640,180, or just over 10 percent of Marylanders, faced hunger, and 30 percent of them were children. Feeding America estimates only account for individuals below the Federal Poverty Level. These numbers grow when considering ALICE households, the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed households where individuals and families live above the Federal Poverty Level but do not make enough to afford basic household necessities based on the local cost of living. In 2018, prior to the pandemic, the ALICE Project estimated that 30 percent of Maryland households are ALICE households, with an additional 9 percent at or below the Federal Poverty Level.

Insufficient and inconsistent incomes leave many households in Maryland without resources to cover all their costs, including food and utilities. This is often exacerbated by the financial and other challenges posed by other circumstances, including advanced age or living with a disability or medical condition.

While water-shut off in a residence negatively impacts all residents, S.B. 883 takes essential initial steps to ensure critical potable water access for residents who face more significant barriers to securing alternative water sources.

On behalf of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC), I would like to record SUPPORT of S.B. 883.

Sincerely yours,

Anne M. Palmer
Co-Chair, Communication and Coordination Committee
Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

SB 883 - FAV - MD Hunger Solutions_3-15-23.pdf

Uploaded by: Elisabet Eppes

Position: FAV



Senate Bill 883

Environment - Water Utilities - Shutoff Protections (Water Access for All Protection Act)

March 15, 2023

SUPPORT

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

My name is Michael J. Wilson. I am the Director of Maryland Hunger Solutions, a statewide, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to end hunger in Maryland by improving participation in the federal nutrition programs. Maryland Hunger Solutions strongly supports Senate Bill 883, which would prevent Maryland water utilities from shutting off a customer's water service due to nonpayment or overdue bills, if the customer suffers from a significant medical condition, earns 50% or less of the median income, is an older adult (65+), or has a physical, cognitive, or medical disability. HB 883 would also prohibit the sale of a customer's home solely to enforce a lien imposed for unpaid water, sewer, or sanitary system charges except in certain circumstances.

Maryland Hunger Solutions' on-the-ground experience as an authorized Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) outreach agency for the state of Maryland has given us a unique perspective on this issue. In recent months, an increasing number of Maryland residents applying for SNAP have also expressed a need for assistance with household bills including electricity, heat, and water. This reflects a rise in inflation, stagnant wages, and the end of pandemic-era expansions of benefit programs including cuts to housing assistance and the end of SNAP emergency allotments. When households are forced to spend more money on rent and food, there is less to spend on utility costs.

For the Maryland residents who will be impacted by this legislation, having their water shut off could pose a threat to their health and safety. We therefore strongly support SB 883, to provide a way for these residents to maintain their water supply even when they may not be able to pay their water bill. In addition to the populations currently included in the bill, we would recommend the inclusion of parents and caregivers of infants who are formula-fed. Consistent access to clean water is crucial for the health and wellbeing of infants receiving formula.

Should SB 883 pass, we would encourage the Maryland Public Service Commission (PSC) and the Department of Human Services (DHS) to authorize and fund state and local outreach organizations to provide assistance to eligible residents who have received a warning from their water utility of an impending shut off. Community organizations could be a crucial resource to provide assistance to residents to prevent shut offs and address serious water service issues.

In conclusion, Maryland Hunger Solutions urges a favorable report for SB 883. Thank you for your consideration of this submission.

SB0883-EEE_MACo_SWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Dominic Butchko

Position: FWA



Senate Bill 883

Environment - Water Utilities - Shutoff Protections
(Water Access for All Protection Act)

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Committee

Date: March 15, 2023

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS SB 883 WITH AMENDMENTS**. The bill gives multiple classes of individuals protections against the standard enforcement mechanisms if they fail to pay their water bills. MACo suggests that the broad statewide policy proposal in SB 883 be accompanied by state funding to ensure other water system users are not unduly burdened by additional costs that may stem from the provisions of this bill.

Access to water is critical in maintaining life and preserving health. Counties recognize that there are those in our society who are at risk of losing access to this precious resource and would be detrimentally impacted beyond what others may experience. This need must also be balanced with the realities of the state's current water infrastructure systems.

When developing Maryland's water infrastructure, policy makers crafted a system largely funded by user fees. In effect, SB 883 would remove a significant portion of revenue used to fund this critical infrastructure. While counties recognize and support the intent of SB 883, the bill's lack of a backstop to fill in this funding gap would translate into either significantly higher user fees or diverting resources from other critical programs. Water infrastructure is incredibly costly to develop and maintain over its lifespan.

MACo appreciates the engagement of the bill sponsor on this issue. **Counties support an amendment to require state resources to backfill anticipated losses to local water systems from its effects.** Ensuring the most vulnerable in our society have basic access to water is a noble and laudable statewide policy goal, but Maryland's local water systems, and their ratepayers, are simply unable to shoulder the weight of this policy alone.

SB 883 represents a good piece of public policy, but without the addition of state support, it is beyond the capacity of counties to implement. Accordingly, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report for SB 883.

SB 883 - UNF-MML.pdf

Uploaded by: Angelica Bailey Thupari

Position: UNF



Maryland Municipal League
The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

TESTIMONY

March 15, 2023

Committee: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment

Bill SB 883 - Environment - Water Utilities - Shutoff Protections (Water Access for All Protection Act)

Position: **Oppose**

Reason for Position:

The Maryland Municipal League opposes Senate Bill 883, which exempts broad groups of individuals from water service shut off.

Almost 90 municipal governments in the State provide community water service to their constituents, including some of the smallest municipalities. Our cities and towns that provide this critical service understand the importance of reliable water service to their citizens. However, providing clean and safe water is costly and onerous. The fees recouped through water bills are restricted to paying the principal and interest on bonds associated with the infrastructure and maintenance, repair, and operation of the water system.

It is the purview of municipal governments to provide water service to their constituents, and the terms of service should remain a local authority. A survey of our members shows that municipalities in the State are quite generous in terms of the number of delinquency notifications before service shut off, the number of days between an account becoming delinquent and service shut off, and offering flexible payment plans.

Municipal governments that provide water service are concerned that without the tool to shut off service to delinquent customers, or at least the threat of service termination, there will be a rise in non-payment of accounts. In response, municipalities would need to increase water rates to recoup lost revenue in order to maintain the same quality of service.

As such, the League respectfully requests that this committee provide SB 883 with an unfavorable report.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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