



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).<sup>1</sup> One in three U S Households face some form of utility insecurity.<sup>2</sup> One in five households reduced or forewent necessities, like food and medicine, to pay a utility bill.<sup>3</sup> 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.

---

<sup>1</sup>US Energy Information Administration Residential Energy Consumption Survey, 2015

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> 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