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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