



February 14, 2023

Wastewater Facility Supplemental Operations and Maintenance Grant Program – Establishment (SB 392)
Position: FAVORABLE

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

Blue Water Baltimore is a nonprofit organization with a mission to restore the quality of Baltimore's rivers, streams, and Harbor to foster a healthy environment, a strong economy, and thriving communities. **We write today in support of Wastewater Facility Supplemental Operations and Maintenance Grant Program – Establishment (SB 392).**

Blue Water Baltimore is home to the Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper, and our licensed jurisdiction through the international Waterkeeper Alliance includes the entirety of the Patapsco and the Back River watersheds. This means that we are uniquely positioned among environmental NGOs in the region to focus on the health and prosperity of these waterways, and the people who live, work, and recreate around them. These rivers accept the effluent from two of Maryland's largest wastewater treatment plants, the Patapsco and Back River WWTPs. **The health of the entire Chesapeake Bay hinges upon the performance of these two facilities, but when there are problems that cause these plants to discharge too much pollution into the rivers, it is our members and our local communities who are most severely impacted and pay the highest price.**

These wastewater treatment facilities are equipped with some of the most cutting-edge technologies available, giving the plants the ability to produce effluent that meets and even exceeds the standards for Enhanced Nutrient Removal systems. When properly maintained and operated, the Patapsco and Back River wastewater treatment plants have the capacity to function as world-class facilities. This is due in large part to the local, state, and federal investments that have been made over the years, particularly the Bay Restoration Fund. **However, there is a gap in available state and federal funding needed to adequately staff these plants with qualified operators and to perform the maintenance needed to keep them running properly.** Instead, these costs fall directly upon the water system's ratepayers, many of whom are already financially overburdened and inequitably impacted. Yet even as the financial burden falls largely upon Baltimore City and Baltimore County residents, the entire Chesapeake Bay community suffers the negative impacts of deferred WWTP maintenance in the form of sick waterways that are neither fishable nor swimmable, two central tenets of the Clean Water Act that was passed more than fifty years ago.

The creation of the Wastewater Facility Supplemental Operations and Maintenance Grant Program would help address this inequitable financial burden by directing new funding specifically to the municipal owners of wastewater treatment plants that serve "low income" communities. **Ultimately, more resources flowing into these facilities will mean cleaner waterways and healthier communities in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Anne Arundel County.**

For these reasons, Blue Water Baltimore strongly supports SB 392 and we urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alice Volpitta". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Alice Volpitta
Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper
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