



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

Senate Bill 246

Wicomico County – Sanitary District – Authorization

Date: February 9, 2023

Position: Support

To: Senate Education, Energy & Environment Committee

From: Alan Girard, Eastern Shore Director

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** SB 246, which authorizes Wicomico County to create a sanitary district. The locality is currently the only Eastern Shore county without this authority.

There are approximately 18,000 septic systems in Wicomico County. Some of these systems are located in “Sewer Problem Areas” as identified in the 2010 Wicomico County Water and Sewer Plan. These areas are places with known septic system failures or systems with potential to fail. When septic systems fail, high concentrations of nutrients and bacteria can enter the groundwater and surface water. Most residential wells installed in the county prior to 2000 access drinking water from unconfined aquifers that are part of the groundwater table. Septic system failures can contaminate these aquifers and lead to a public health emergency. Nutrient-laden septic effluent in groundwater that leaches to local rivers can also make local waters unsafe for swimming and fishing and can threaten the health of aquatic life in the Chesapeake Bay.

To address these issues, Wicomico County officials are considering establishing a county sanitary district. A sanitary district will enable the county to create a formal structure for correcting septic system failures, that where feasible and intentionally designed to not serve new growth, may include centralized treatment solutions. The County is currently evaluating measures that can help accurately assess the extent of septic failures while involving citizens to validate these problems and inform a local response. The sanitary district authorization enabled by SB 246 will provide Wicomico County with an administrative pathway to identify service area and treatment alternatives, develop and satisfy wastewater policy compliance measures, and create governance, operations, and finance strategies that can help correct septic system failures within the jurisdiction.

CBF urges the Committee’s FAVORABLE report on SB 246. For more information, please contact Alan Girard, Eastern Shore Director at agirard@cbf.org.

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 300,000 members and e-subscribers, including over 109,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.