



City Union of Baltimore

Local 800, AFT, AFL-CIO

**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
From the City Union of Baltimore, AFT Local 800
SB 880– Baltimore Regional Water Governance Taskforce
March 15, 2023**

Favorable-with-amendments

Good morning, members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee. My name is Antoinette Ryan-Johnson, and I am the President of the City Union of Baltimore, a union for Baltimore City employees, including almost 400 city employees working in the city's water and wastewater department. We call for a favorable-with-amendments report for SB 880, the bill that would create a taskforce to study the potential to create a regional water utility for Baltimore City and County. We have appended the proposed amendments to our written testimony for your review.

Our amendments– drafted in concert with our coalition partners in Food and Water Watch, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, and other environmental and social justice organizations– relate largely to three major fields:

1. taskforce membership to ensure employee and community voices are included in these vital discussions;
2. insurances that the water utility system will not be privatized and the protections the people of Baltimore have placed to safeguard their water system are respected; and
3. adjusting the timeline of a report due back so that these major substantial issues can be studied with the depth and breadth necessary for an undertaking of this sort, with opportunities for enough input on the work of the taskforce from the residents of Baltimore City and County.

The City Union of Baltimore represents city workers who work in the water and wastewater systems for Baltimore city, our members perform many duties for the City including supervising the operations and employees of the fresh water and wastewater plants, testing and treating fresh water to ensure it is safe for human consumption, testing and treating waste water to ensure it is environmentally safe and free of harmful contaminants. Other employees supervise and maintain the billing system in Baltimore City, generating revenue for the City. While others maintain the residential and commercial meter systems as well as the maintaining the above ground and underground utilities of the water system. These members

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not only have particular, valuable, front-line insights on the strengths and weaknesses of the current system, but also have a right to participate in larger conversations over decisions that may impact their work. Their representation on this taskforce is a must.

Members of the committee, the proposed work of this taskforce must not be understated: the undertaking of a monumental task to re-envision how water, a fundamental human right, is fairly and equitably distributed to residents in both our city and Baltimore County, must not be taken lightly. This task must have ample input from the community members most impacted by decisions being made, and include voices of those who are engaged in the day-to-day operations of the delivery and upkeep of our city's water system. Our amendments to the taskforce membership portion of the bill call for the mayor and the county executive to appoint at least one representative each from the union of City and County employees currently working for the water systems. In addition, the amendment calls for the Governor to appoint members to the taskforce that represent low-income water rate payers, as water affordability issues have been at the forefront of conversations regarding City and County water over the past decade.

Finally, we call for a rethinking of the deadline for the taskforce to submit its report and recommendations to the general assembly; nine months is simply just not enough time to effectively study this issue, consider the potential outcomes, and hear concerns from impacted members of the public. While there has been a study published in 2021, commissioned by both the city and the county, that study was a general business process review. If the charge of this taskforce is to look specifically at how the current water system may be transformed into another alternative regional water system, more time needs be devoted to looking at the costs and means by which the current systems can be transferred to a new regional entity.

We ask that the committee adopt these amendments and issue a favorable-with-amendments report to SB 880. Thank you.