

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB0513

I write to offer my full support for SB0513. I believe that with the creation of an Open Water Data Reporting Platform that this Bill proposes, there will be greater transparency and accountability around water and wastewater service provision, water arrearages, water shutoffs, etc. This kind of transparency is sorely needed in order to address the inequities that exist in the system that lead to the “accessibility trap” as highlighted by The Center for Water Security and Cooperation.

The reality is that the cost to provide clean water has risen faster than personal income for many years. Statistics show that nationally between 2008 and 2014, residential rates for water and wastewater increased by 41 percent and 37 percent, respectively and from 2002 to 2016, the annual service charge for clean water services doubled from \$239 to \$479. These increases actually outpaced the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for this same period. The CPI rose by 33 percent. Maryland mirrors these figures. Low income residents are particularly vulnerable to adverse outcomes due to these rapidly rising costs, with little to no relief available.

Law, primarily local law, governs access to drinking water. And for low income families, already at greater risk for non-payment of bills, these laws often result in persistent periods of loss of access to clean drinking water. I am convinced that the specific provisions of SB0513 e.g. the 55 enumerated items that must be included in the platform, disaggregation of the data by nine-digit zip code, etc. will lead to responsive changes that fully address the current challenges and end the accessibility trap.