

March 14, 2023

2023 SESSION SUPPORT TESTIMONY

S.B. 883 Environment - Water Utilities - Shutoff Protections (Water Access for All Protection Act)

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment

POSITION: Testimony of Support of Senate Bill 883

BILL ANALYSIS: Authorizes a water utility to temporarily shut off service for reasons of health or safety or in a State or national emergency; prohibits a water utility from shutting off service for certain reasons and/or on receipt of certain information; and prohibits the sale of property solely to enforce a lien imposed for unpaid water, sewer, or sanitary system charges, fees, or assessments.

SIGNED: Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FRSC)

Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement is for the record **in SUPPORT of S.B. 883**. I am submitting this letter on behalf of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC), and it does not necessarily represent the views of the State of Maryland. The Maryland General Assembly established the FSRC in the 2021 legislative session to bring together 33 appointed council members from across the state, all with different points of entry and expertise, to work toward a common goal of a more resilient food system and address the food insecurity crisis due to COVID-19. One of the key mandates of this council was to develop equitable and sustainable policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the Maryland food system.

The FSRC believes this legislation will advance several of our priority goals, including:

- Address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic crisis
- Develop equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system;

Access to safe water for cooking and drinking is essential to the nutrition security of all people. S.B. 883 protects essential access to residential water for some of our state's most at-risk residents, older adults 65+ with lower incomes, and those with certain medical conditions and impairments.

As outlined in the FSRC's 2021 report to the Maryland General Assembly: prior to COVID-19's impact on Maryland, an estimated 640,180, or just over 10 percent of Marylanders, faced hunger, and 30 percent of them were children. Feeding America estimates only account for individuals below the Federal Poverty Level. These numbers grow when considering ALICE households, the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed households where individuals and families live above the Federal Poverty Level but do not make enough to afford basic household necessities based on the local cost of living. In 2018, prior to the pandemic, the ALICE Project estimated that 30 percent of Maryland households are ALICE households, with an additional 9 percent at or below the Federal Poverty Level.

Insufficient and inconsistent incomes leave many households in Maryland without resources to cover all their costs, including food and utilities. This is often exacerbated by the financial and other challenges posed by other circumstances, including advanced age or living with a disability or medical condition.

While water-shut off in a residence negatively impacts all residents, S.B. 883 takes essential initial steps to ensure critical potable water access for residents who face more significant barriers to securing alternative water sources.

On behalf of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC), I would like to record SUPPORT of S.B. 883.

Sincerely yours,

Anne M. Palmer
Co-Chair, Communication and Coordination Committee
Maryland Food System Resiliency Council