



House Bill 893

Environment - Water Utilities - Shutoff Protections

(Water Access for All Protection Act)

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Environment and Transportation
Committee

WITH AMENDMENTS

Date: March 1, 2023

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS HB 893 WITH AMENDMENTS**. The bill gives multiple classes of individuals protections against the standard enforcement mechanisms if they fail to pay their water bills. MACo suggests that the broad statewide policy proposal in HB 893 be accompanied by state funding to ensure other water system users are not unduly burdened by additional costs that may stem from the provisions of this bill.

Access to water is critical in maintaining life and preserving health. Counties recognize that there are those in our society who are at risk of losing access to this precious resource and would be detrimentally impacted beyond what others may experience. This need must also be balanced with the realities of the state's current water infrastructure systems.

When developing Maryland's water infrastructure, policy makers crafted a system largely funded by user fees. In effect, HB 893 would remove a significant portion of revenue used to fund this critical infrastructure. While counties recognize and support the intent of HB 893, the bill's lack of a backstop to fill in this funding gap would translate into either significantly higher user fees or diverting resources from other critical programs. Water infrastructure is incredibly costly to develop and maintain over its lifespan.

MACo appreciates the engagement of the bill sponsor on this issue. **Counties support an amendment to require state resources to backfill anticipated losses to local water systems from its effects.**

Ensuring the most vulnerable in our society have basic access to water is a noble and laudable statewide policy goal, but Maryland's local water systems, and their ratepayers, are simply unable to shoulder the weight of this policy alone.

HB 893 represents a good piece of public policy, but without the addition of state support, it is beyond the capacity of counties to implement. Accordingly, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report for HB 893.