



BALTIMORE COUNTY
FEDERATION OF
PUBLIC EMPLOYEES
AFT / AFL - CIO / BCFPE Local #4883

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**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House of Delegates Environment and Transportation Committee
From the Baltimore County Federation of Public Employees, AFT Local 4883
HB 843– Baltimore Regional Water Governance Taskforce
March 1, 2023**

Favorable-with-amendments

Good afternoon Chair Barve and members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee. My name is John Ripley, and I am the President of the Baltimore County Federation of Public Employees representing over 1500 county employees, including hundreds of employees working with the county's water services. I am also on the Executive Board of AFT Maryland and the Metropolitan Baltimore Council of AFL-CIO. We call for a favorable-with-amendments report for HB 843, 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: taskforce membership to ensure employee and community voices are included in these vital discussions, 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 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.

Again, BCFPE represents hundreds of county workers who work in the water and wastewater systems for Baltimore county. These members 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, if fairly and equitably distributed to residents in both our county and Baltimore City, must not be taken lightly. This task must have ample output from the community members most impacted by decisions we are making, 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 county and city 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 HB 843.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John E. Ripley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

President John Ripley

Baltimore County Federation of Public Employees Local #4883

AFT Maryland / Metropolitan Baltimore Council AFL-CIO - CLC