



## House Bill 831

### *Environment – Septic Systems – Online Database*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**  
**WITH AMENDMENTS**

To: Environment and Transportation  
Committee

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From: Sarah Sample and Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 831 **WITH AMENDMENTS**. This bill would require the Maryland Department of the Environment to establish an online database of all septic systems installed in the state in collaboration with local environmental health departments. While this legislation could help modernize septic management by creating a comprehensive archive of all statewide systems, amendments should clarify that it be implemented in a way that does not create any reporting redundancies or additional burden on the local offices who manage this process.

The vast majority of county environmental health departments are currently managing the care, condition, and installation of all new and existing septic systems within their jurisdictions by the use of an online database that is managed locally. This is a tool that helps environmental health specialists track information and process applications. While this is a valuable tool, many of these departments are currently understaffed and overburdened with their existing workload. As failing septic fields can pose a serious environmental hazard, it is imperative that these offices are not encumbered with extensive mandates that interfere with their safety mission.

Counties appreciate the value of a comprehensive system that is able to pool all the existing statewide data, currently strewn across multiple local systems. The ability to assess variables from county to county could certainly provide valuable insights for the current and future state of the trade. With these benefits in mind, counties urge amendments to ensure the potential of this legislation is realized while avoiding any unnecessary pitfalls for the local teams.

For any counties without an existing database, the Department of the Environment should accept and update information in the format that is decided by the local department to be the most expedient process. This will ensure the statewide database is able to provide the desired breadth of information without resulting in a great operational burden for the county divisions. The same should be true of the costs associated with the statewide database, where the onus is on the Maryland Department of the Environment to fund the development and management of its own database.

Additionally, since counties have taken such great initiative in establishing their own online programs, counties would request that they receive robust representation on the database development workgroup to maximize streamlining the transfer of data from the local systems to the statewide database. Once the statewide database is established, the State should be responsible for all future system updates.

Counties have taken the first important steps in modernizing the process of tracking and managing septic systems and appreciate HB 831's intent for the State to further this progress. Counties support this direction, provided the appropriate safeguards are in place to ensure the harmony of local teams and legacy systems in the implementation process. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report for HB 831.