

An Affiliate of
the Maryland Association
of Counties, Inc.



Reply to:

DATE: 03/01/2023
TO: Members, House Environment and Transportation Committee
FROM: Maryland Conference of Local Environmental Health Directors
RE: House Bill 831-Environment- Septic Systems- Online database

The Maryland Conference of Local Environmental Health Directors (Conference), an affiliate of the Maryland Association of Counties, **DOES NOT SUPPORT** House Bill 831.

The Conference fully supports the concept of digitizing septic system records and making them readily available to the public. However, the way that this bill goes about accomplishing this goal is problematic for several reasons. First and foremost, there is no mention of if or how this initiative will be funded. The referenced records are all housed and managed by Local Environmental Health Departments (county governments in a few instances). The costs of this initiative will be in the **MILLIONS** and it will likely take decades to accomplish this work as described in this bill.

It is important for everyone to know that not all Local Health Departments keep records in the same manner. There are at least 5 Local Health Departments or county governments that have their residential septic system records completely digitized and 84% of Local Health Departments have a significant amount of digitization already underway. The way that this bill is crafted, many if not all of those records systems would not comply with (A) of 9-1114. Additionally, the timelines laid out are **completely unrealistic**. The systems that exist now with digitized septic records cost the taxpayers many hundreds of thousands of dollars and decades of time and resources to create. For the 18 remaining jurisdictions to accomplish the same tasks when we are already terribly under resourced and understaffed is completely outside the realm of possibilities.

The Conference recommends that the bill sponsor withdraw this bill and work with us and the Department of the Environment to determine the best path forward for the future. We are very much in favor of digitizing septic system records, however we believe that this would be best accomplished through individualized grants to Local Health Departments that allow us to secure digitization and database services unique to each jurisdiction's existing systems and needs. Additionally, these types of online databases are not a one-time investment and local health departments would need additional staffing to support upkeep of the databases.

The Conference recommends an **UNFAVORABLE** report.

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