



Senate Bill 830

*Environmental Health Specialists and Well and Septic Systems Permitting - Studies
(Environmental Health Systems Support Act of 2023)*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Environment & Transportation and Health
and Government Operations Committees

Date: March 30, 2023

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties **SUPPORTS SB 830 WITH AMENDMENTS**. This bill would require the Maryland Department of the Environment and the Maryland Department of Health, in consultation with the Board of Environmental Health Specialists, to conduct a study on workforce issues that have not improved for local environmental health specialists since the 2005 Johns Hopkins study titled, "Profile of Maryland Environmental Public Health Practice."

While MACo believes a study is a useful next step, the amendments to this bill now read that the Department of the Environment shall study the current delegation of authority to the Maryland Department of Health as opposed to contracting for services from a third-party. Given that the Department of the Environment is one of two parties to this current arrangement, counties join the Maryland Conference of Local Environmental Health Directors in urging that a study should be performed by a third-party institution – such as an institution of higher education – that does not have direct programmatic oversight responsibilities.

Considering the significant demand on local environmental health departments and the necessity for more resources to meet those needs, this legislation presents an opportunity to bring about lasting changes across the industry. Regardless, counties remain committed to the most pressing and urgent issue these departments face, which is a need to update current salaries for local environmental health specialists, and proceeding with position reclassifications where they are found appropriate based on market trends.

Another year without these changes will only serve to make a precarious situation even more dire. Attracting and retaining qualified professionals will not be possible until a reasonable wage is paid to recognize the market value of these individuals with a 4-year science degree. Addressing these labor market discrepancies is tantamount to bolstering and sustaining these departments.

There is a great deal of variability in how each jurisdiction operates and organizes these departments and their efforts across the state have maintained the safety of vital resources that no one can live without – food, water, and a healthy environment. Counties appreciate that this bill attempts to take a comprehensive look at some of the issues facing state and local environmental health departments. The problems that environmental health specialists have been facing in Maryland are significant at every level. Accordingly, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report on SB 830.