

HB843-Baltimore Regional Water Governance Task Force
Position: Informational Only

Good afternoon, Chair Barve and Vic-Chair Stein and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee. Thank you for the opportunity for AFSCME Council 67 to submit informational testimony on HB 843 the Baltimore Regional Water and Governance Task Force bill. The purpose of this bill is to establish the Baltimore Regional Water Governance Task Force to study approaches to water and wastewater governance in the Baltimore region, and generally relating to water supply and wastewater treatment in the Baltimore region.

The water supply system developed by Baltimore City has supported the development and expansion of adjacent regional counties. Baltimore County and Baltimore City entered into agreements in 1945 and 1963, and, most recently, in 1972 and 1974 recognizing that substantial increases in population, volume of sewage, operation and maintenance costs, and costs of construction for the jointly used water and wastewater systems compelled updates to the jurisdiction management and funding of the systems. Due to regional population growth, Baltimore City's water and wastewater system now provides water and wastewater service to additional jurisdictions, including Anne Arundel County, Carroll County, Harford County, and Howard County and now serves more than 1.8 million regional residents.

Baltimore City and Baltimore County jointly engaged consultants to conduct a comprehensive business process review to identify strengths and weaknesses of the current governance, planning, data management, and operations of the water and wastewater utilities, to identify opportunities to improve interjurisdictional collaboration, and to understand the current state of the structures and processes for the delivery of water and wastewater services, including operations, planning, and billing, the results of which were finalized in July 2021 in the Water/Sewer Services Comprehensive Business Process. The consultants highlighted the development, operations, and governance of several existing regional models for water and wastewater across the country and a decision to develop the Baltimore Regional Water Governance Taskforce.

AFSCME local 44 represents public employees in local government and specifically Baltimore City Public Works. As we move forward with this creation of a task force, we have a vested interest in being apart of the conversation on the future of water systems in Baltimore City and its employees. We believe that our members expertise and experiences would be invaluable to the task force as discussions concerning employee recruitment and retention, training, and operations are being proposed. Around the country, our members have participated in taskforce to lend a worker prospective.

Thank you, Chair Barve, Vice-Chair Stein for your time.

