



# ***City Union of Baltimore***

**Local 800, AFT, AFL-CIO**

**Written Testimony Submitted to the  
Maryland House of Delegates Energy and Transportation Committee  
From the City Union of Baltimore, AFT Local 800  
HB 843– Baltimore Regional Water Governance Taskforce  
March 1, 2023**

**Favorable-with-amendments**

Good morning, Chair Barve and members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee. My name is Maxine Holmes, and I am a Labor Relations Specialist for the City Union of Baltimore, a union for Baltimore City employees, including 395 city employees working in the city's water and wastewater department. 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.

The City Union of Baltimore represents city workers who work in the water and wastewater systems for Baltimore city, our members perform many duties for the City including supervising the operations and employees of the fresh water and wastewater plants, testing and treating fresh water to ensure it is safe for human consumption, testing and treating wastewater to ensure it is environmentally safe and free of harmful contaminants. Other employees supervise and maintain the billing system in Baltimore City, generating revenue for the City. While others maintain the residential and commercial meter systems as well as the maintaining the above ground and underground utilities of the water system. 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.

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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, is fairly and equitably distributed to residents in both our city and Baltimore County, must not be taken lightly. This task must have ample input from the community members most impacted by decisions being made, 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 City and County 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.

**Proposed amendments.**

Amendment 1. Adjusting the membership of the taskforce

Page 3, line 2  
After "Governor"  
add

**"INCLUDING: 1. ONE REPRESENTATIVE FROM A LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION REPRESENTING LOW-INCOME WATER RATEPAYERS IN THE CITY, AND 2. ONE LOW-INCOME WATER RATEPAYER IN THE CITY."**

Page 3, line 3  
After "Mayor of Baltimore City"  
add

**“, INCLUDING AT LEAST ONE MEMBER FROM CITY UNION OF BALTIMORE, AFT LOCAL 800, REPRESENTING EMPLOYEES WORKING IN THE CITY’S WATER/WASTEWATER FACILITIES**

Page 3, line 5  
After "County"  
add

**“, INCLUDING AT LEAST ONE MEMBER FROM THE BALTIMORE COUNTY FEDERATION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES, AFT LOCAL 4883, REPRESENTING COUNTY EMPLOYEES WORKING IN THE COUNTY’S WATER DEPARTMENT”**

Page 3, line 13  
Strike "or"  
and add

**"4. UTILITY SERVICE AFFORDABILITY, INCLUDING PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE; 5. RACIAL EQUITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS; 6. COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENTS; 7. SEWAGE BACKUPS, INCLUDING PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE; 8. STORMWATER; 9. INTEGRATED PLANNING; 10. CLIMATE RESILIENCY; 11. SOURCE WATER PROTECTION; OR 12. PUBLIC HEALTH; AND”**

Page 3, line 14  
After "(ii)"  
add

**“EITHER 1. RECEIVE WATER AND WASTEWATER SERVICE FROM THE WATER AND WASTEWATER UTILITY, OR 2.”**

Amendment 2. Including racial equity and economic equity impact assessments

Page 5, line 6

Strike “and”

and add

**“(5) CONDUCT A RACIAL EQUITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND AN ECONOMIC EQUITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOR EACH ALTERNATIVE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE; AND”**

Page 5, line 7

Strike “(5)”

and add

**“(6)”**

Amendment 3: Directing the Task Force to limit their study to public sector solutions that will (1) exclude private for-profit ownership, operation or management of the systems as prohibited by the Baltimore City Charter, (2) protect democratic decision-making and the rights of workers and residents, and (3) not undermine or conflict with local water affordability laws and charter protections approved by voters.

Page 5, line 11

After “Task Force shall”

Add

**“(1) CONSIDER ONLY ALTERNATIVE GOVERNANCE MODELS THAT ADHERE TO RATEPAYER AND LABOR PROTECTIONS ESTABLISHED BY LOCAL JURISDICTIONS, INCLUDING: (i) BALTIMORE CITY BALLOT QUESTION E OF 2018, WHICH WAS APPROVED BY VOTERS, TO AMEND THE CITY CHARTER TO PROHIBIT PRIVATE, FOR-PROFIT OWNERSHIP, OPERATION OR MANAGEMENT OF THE WATER SUPPLY AND WASTEWATER SYSTEM; (ii) THE WATER ACCOUNTABILITY AND EQUITY ACT OF BALTIMORE CITY, WHICH ESTABLISHED: A LOW-INCOME WATER AFFORDABILITY PROGRAM; WATER SHUTOFF PROTECTIONS FOR**

**VULNERABLE HOUSEHOLDS; A DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS; RIGHTS OF TENANTS TO RECEIVE THEIR BILLS, ACCESS ASSISTANCE, AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION; AND AN OFFICE OF CUSTOMER ADVOCACY AND APPEALS; (iii) COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENTS, WORKER PENSIONS, AND BENEFITS FOR WORKERS IN THE CITY AND THE COUNTY; AND (iv) BALTIMORE CITY'S SEWAGE ONSITE SUPPORT PROGRAM AND EXPEDITED REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM; ”**

Page 5, line 11  
Before “consult with”  
add  
“(2)”

Amendment 4: Requiring public input.

Page 5, line 12  
After “Service”  
strike “.”  
and add  
“; AND (3) PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC INPUT BY:  
(1) PUBLISHING A DRAFT OF ITS FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC REVIEW ON THE WEBSITES OF THE CITY AND COUNTY; (2) HOLDING PUBLIC HEARINGS: (I) PRIOR TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DRAFT REPORT; (II) AFTER THE ISSUANCE OF A DRAFT REPORT; (III) WITH HEARINGS HELD ONLINE AND IN PERSON AT DIFFERENT TIMES OF DAY AND LOCATED AT: 1. THE SEVEN EARLY VOTING SITES WITHIN THE CITY; 2. FIVE LOCATIONS IN THE COUNTY AT SITES WITHIN THE WATER SYSTEM SERVICE AREA THAT ARE CONVENIENT FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION; AND 3. ONE LOCATION IN EACH OF THE FOUR OTHER JURISDICTIONS OF THE AFFECTED COUNTIES. (3) PROVIDING A PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD OF AT LEAST 90 DAYS ON THE DRAFT REPORT PRIOR TO FINALIZING THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS; (4) ASSESSING THE PUBLIC INPUT IN THE FINAL REPORT BY (I) SUMMARIZING THE PUBLIC HEARINGS, PUBLIC COMMENTS, AND OTHER FEEDBACK; (II) ADDRESSING HOW THAT INFORMATION WAS INCORPORATED INTO THE FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS; AND (III) EXPLAINING THE REASONS WHY ANY PUBLIC FEEDBACK WAS NOT INCORPORATED INTO THE FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS; (5) ADVERTISING ALL TASK FORCE MEETINGS ON THE WEBSITES OF ALL AFFECTED

**JURISDICTIONS AND THE MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, AND ON AT LEAST ONE SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT; AND (6) HOLDING ALL MEETINGS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC ONLINE AND IN-PERSON, PURSUANT TO THE MARYLAND OPEN MEETINGS ACT.”**

Amendment 5: Expanding the timeline to allow sufficient time to conduct the review and solicit public feedback.

Page 5, line 13  
After “On or before”  
add

**“JUNE 30, 2025, THE TASK FORCE SHALL REPORT ITS DRAFT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MAYOR OF BALTIMORE CITY, THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE OF BALTIMORE COUNTY, THE GOVERNOR, AND, IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 2-1257 OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT ARTICLE, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.”**

Page 5, line 13  
Strike (i)  
Add  
**“(j)”**

Page 5, line 13  
After “On or before”  
strike “January 30, 2024” and  
add  
**“June 30, 2027”**

Page 5, line 13  
After “Task Force shall report its”  
add  
**“final”**

Page 5, line 21  
After “remain effect through June 30,”  
strike “2024” and  
add  
**“2027”**

Page 5, line 21

After “at the end of June 30,”  
strike “2024” and  
add  
“2027”