



Testimony in Support of House Bill 0011 – Private Well Safety Act of 2023

January 30, 2023

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony **in support of HB0011, Private Well Safety Act of 2023**, on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland's Eastern Shore with more than 2,000 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education. ShoreRivers believes that access for all communities to clean water is an essential right, and **what could be more essential than clean, safe, drinking water?**

As a Riverkeeper, I research and collect water quality data including nitrogen, phosphorus, and fecal enterococci bacteria levels and communicate my findings to communities within my watershed. I am committed to providing this information so that individuals and families can make informed decisions about swimming or recreating in their local waterways. **The establishment of an accessible online database of well water quality results would allow Riverkeepers and other water advocacy organizations to connect their local communities to transparent, credible data about the ground water they drink.**

As an advocate for the Chester River, I work primarily with the residents of Kent and Queen Anne's counties, two of the most agricultural counties in Maryland. Their intensely rural landscapes and sparsely set subdivisions mean that large percentages of the population are not connected to town utilities, and are reliant on well water. Many residents have never tested their water supply beyond what was required to build the well, leaving them and future residents at risk of ingesting coliform bacteria, harmful nitrates, and chemical runoff associated with agricultural practices. A Maryland Department of the Environment report from 2013 states that, "Nitrate pollution in groundwater is becoming increasingly problematic, [...] Due to agricultural land use practices, nitrate concentrations in shallow waters of unconfined Coastal Plain aquifers on Maryland's Eastern Shore commonly exceed the Federal Drinking Water Standard."¹ The department's 2021 report indicates that not much has changed. **Requiring water quality testing during the sale of a home with a well will, at minimum, increase data available through the state's online portal, and**

¹ Maryland Department of the Environment. *Groundwater Protection Program Annual Report to the Maryland General Assembly 2013*. July 2013. Available at https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/Water/water_supply/Source_Water_Assessment_Program/Documents/FINAL_GWR%20report_1_2013%203_.pdf.

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protect new homeowners from buying a home with contaminated and harmful water.

Within my watershed, it is often overburdened and underserved communities who have face greatest risk of living with contaminated well water. This is a result of these communities residing in low-lying land that is disproportionately burdened with environmental hazards such as stormwater flooding and agricultural runoff. **Requiring the Maryland Department of the Environment to establish a Private Well Safety Program will provide eligible residents with financial assistance to cover the costs associated with water test kits, and provide the opportunity for residents to remediate their wells when unsafe levels of contamination are found.**

The Private Well Safety Act of 2023 will establish common sense protections and protocols that support private well owners, homebuyers, water advocacy organizations, and lower-income families who may bear a disproportionate burden from unsafe drinking water. For these reasons and the examples described above, ShoreRivers urges the committee to adopt **House Bill 0011**.

Sincerely,
Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper on behalf of:

ShoreRivers

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper

