

Maryland House of Delegates, Environment and Transportation Committee
Delegate Kumar P. Barve, Chair
March 1, 2023

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL S. MYERS
Member, Back River Neck Peninsula Community Association, Inc.

Good afternoon Chairman Barve and members of the Committee. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and discuss the bill creating a task force to study Baltimore Regional Water Governance.

My name is Mike Myers and I am a member of the Back River Neck Peninsula Community Association. My home is on the shore of Back River where I have resided for the last 10 years.

I am here to testify in favor of the proposed legislation because I think a significant change in management of our water utilities is warranted. Notwithstanding my support, I would like to offer four (4) amendments to the bill as its presently written.

1. First, I would like to suggest a modification of Section 1, Paragraph (i) to shorten the reporting deadline of the Task Force by 90 days from its current date of January 30, 2024 to October 31, 2023. The report will contain findings and recommendations, including proposed legislation, that the community stakeholders would like to review prior to the start of the 2024 legislative session. There are at least 6 community organizations with hundreds of members each that we would like to coordinate a unified assessment of the report, and coordinate with our elected officials and other stakeholders. We are hoping to see new governance legislation enacted in the 2024 session.

2. Second, I would like to see a modification of Section 1, Paragraph (i) to require that the report be made available to the general public. As currently written, the report is to be provided only to the Mayor of Baltimore City, the County Executive of Baltimore County, and to the General Assembly.
3. Third, Paragraph 1, Section (g)(3) currently requires the task force to assesses the governance structures for the Baltimore metro area's water and wastewater utility. I would suggest an even broader scope of the Task Force by going further and examining a potential merger of the 2 million customers of WSSC with the 1.8 million customers of the Baltimore metro area into a large Washington Baltimore Commission with 3.8 million total customers. There may be economies of scale that can be passed down ratepayers across the region, and other benefits, of such an entity. I think its worth some examination.
4. And finally, my fourth suggestion is a modification of Section 1, Paragraph (b)(1) concerning membership on the Committee. As the bill stands, Baltimore City Mayor is allocated 5 members to sit on the Task Force while Baltimore County is allocated only 3. According to 2020 census data, Baltimore County has about 850,000 people compared to Baltimore City's 576,000. Also, according to the 2021 Water/Sewer Comprehensive Business Process Review, Baltimore County has 206,000 water accounts compared to Baltimore City's 194,000. The current ratio does not properly represent stakeholders affected by the legislation. An equal number of County and City members would be more aligned with the goals of Environmental Justice. Those goals are fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people with respect to development and implementation of environmental laws, regulations, and polices.

I hope the committee will consider my suggestions. Thank you.