



**TO:** Members, House Health and Government Operations Committee

**FROM:** Maryland Conference of Local Environmental Health Directors  
Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO)

**SUBJECT:** HB 273 – Health Occupations – Environmental Health Specialists – Revisions

**POSITION:** Support As Amended

**DATE:** February 22, 2023

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The Maryland Conference of Local Environmental Health Directors (the Conference), representing the county Environmental Health programs, and the Maryland Association of Health Officers (MACHO), the professional association representing the state's Health Officers who oversee the local Environmental Health (EH) programs in their local health departments (LHDs), support HB 273, as amended. The Conference and MACHO are affiliates of the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo).

HB 273 will be of direct benefits to the professional Board of Environmental Health Specialists (BEHS) and to LHDs, as well as indirect benefit to the state agencies, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) that delegate authorities to the LHDs, and most importantly, benefit the citizens of Maryland.

HB 273 will provide BEHS with the capability and flexibility to make decisions to qualify applicants to obtain a Certificate of Eligibility to work as an Environmental Health Specialist (EHS). Most importantly, the bill will provide BEHS with the ability to recognize and approve an apprenticeship program currently being developed by MDH and Morgan State University. This apprenticeship program will give students a direct pathway into the EHS career field, working under the supervision of licensed EHSs.

In turn, the apprenticeship program will benefit LHDs by serving as an invaluable educational and training program, expanding the number of EHS staff in the state. LHDs also hope that it will assist in rectifying current workforce shortages affecting their departments. Currently, several LHDs have critical staffing shortages and overall, LHD EH programs have a 40% vacancy rate. Experienced and well trained EHS professionals are critical in the review and issuance of permits in the well, septic, swimming pool, and food program areas, and specifically, the review and approval of building permits.

As a result, expanding the number of prepared, certified, and licensed EHS in the state will increase efficiency and reduce backlogs in the impacted counties and shore up the workforce in LHD EH programs overall to prepare communities for planned growth and expansion. The programs outlined in HB 273 are critical to public health and keeping the public and the environment safe.

Therefore, the Conference and MACHO respectfully request the Committee give HB 273 a **FAVORABLE** report. Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony. For questions regarding this written testimony, please contact:

Ruth Maiorana

Don Curtian, Director