



Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

February 22, 2023

The Honorable Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: HB 273 - Health Occupations - Environmental Health Specialists - Revisions - Letter of Support with Amendments

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) respectfully submits this letter of support with amendments for House Bill (HB) 273 - Health Occupations - Environmental Health Specialists - Revisions. HB 273 revises the eligibility requirements for licensure as an Environmental Health (EH) Specialist. This bill also broadens the practice of EH Specialists to include public health emergency preparedness and alters the process by which the Board of EH Specialists administers examinations.

EH Specialists are foundational to the provision of EH services across the state, which include permitting and inspections for well and septic systems, conducting soil evaluations, reviewing building permits, licensing and inspecting food service facilities and public swimming pools, responding to complaints and environmental emergencies, and other activities. Businesses, developers, and the public rely on the timely provision of these essential services.

Despite their immense importance to public health, local health departments (LHDs) have had significant difficulties in recruiting and retaining EH Specialists. These challenges predate the COVID-19 pandemic but were exacerbated by the additional strain on LHDs as staff were redirected to contact tracing and other response priorities. Some LHDs have a significant backlog of applications and long turnaround times, leading to complaints and inquiries from residents and the business community. In the worst case, a continuing decline in LHD capacity may lead to unmitigated EH hazards, including failed septic systems, groundwater contaminations, environmental degradation, and human health impacts, as well as delays in new development projects.

As written, HB 273 will expand the pool of individuals potentially eligible to be licensed as an EH Specialist, which will help to address the urgent need for more EH Specialists. Additionally, the amendment that MDH proposes will give the EH Board a structure to consider candidates through an apprenticeship pathway that MDH is developing with Morgan State University to build a pipeline for EH Specialists. This apprenticeship program would provide college students

a paid apprenticeship within LHDs to increase the pool of candidates qualified for work as EH Specialists. MDH strongly urges the Committee to support this amendment.

In addition, MDH has concerns about the addition of the category of public health preparedness to the list of practice areas governed by the Board. MDH notes that public health emergency preparedness is an attribute of almost every category of worker within the public health community, as has been most recently demonstrated during the response to COVID-19. MDH believes that adding this to the scope of practices governed by the Board may unintentionally sweep in many workers whose primary work is not relevant to the Board or the practice of environmental health. MDH supports an amendment removing the proposed change in scope.

This bill will have an operational impact on MDH. Increasing the number of EH Specialists in the state would improve the delivery of EH services as a whole and reduce the need to redirect resources away from other programs and services at the state and local levels. MDH strongly supports HB 273 and urges a favorable report from the committee.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Megan Peters, Acting Director of Governmental Affairs at megan.peters@maryland.gov or (410) 260-3190.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'LH Scott', is positioned above the typed name.

Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary

AMENDMENTS TO HOUSE BILL 273
(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, strike beginning with “altering” in line 3 down through “specialist;” in line 4.

On page 1, in line 18, strike “Section 21–101(i),”.

On page 1, strike in its entirety lines 11 through 15, inclusive.

On page 2, in line 18, strike the bracket.

On page 2, strike beginning with “sanitation;” in line 19 down through line 21 in its entirety and substitute “SANITATION.”

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 1, in line 4, after “specialist;”, insert “adding a new definition of “apprenticeship”; clarifying licensure exceptions to address apprenticeships; requiring the Board of Environmental Health Specialists to adopt regulations regarding apprenticeships;”.”

On page 1, in line 18, strike “21–101(i),” and substitute “21–101, 21–301,” and, in the same line, after “21–304,” insert “21–305,”.

On page 1, after line 25, insert:

“(B) “APPRENTICESHIP” MEANS A PROGRAM OF TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF A LICENSED ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST THAT IS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR A BACCALAUREATE DEGREE BASED IN ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH, AS PROVIDED IN REGULATIONS ADOPTED BY THE BOARD, FROM AN ACCREDITED COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY;

[(b)] (C) “Board” means the State Board of Environmental Health Specialists.

[(c)] (D) “Environmental health specialist” means an individual who practices as an environmental health specialist.

[(d)] (E) “Environmental health specialist–in–training” means an individual who meets the educational qualifications required under this title but has not yet completed the environmental health specialist–in–training program required under § 21–305 of this title.

[(e)] (F) “Environmental health specialist–in–training program” means a program of training and experience under the supervision of a licensed environmental health specialist or other individual acceptable to the Board.

[(f)] (G) “Hours of approved training” means the value given to participation in continuing education or experience as approved by the Board.

[(g)] (H) “License” means, unless the context requires otherwise, a license issued by the Board to practice as an environmental health specialist.

[(h)] (i) “Licensed environmental health specialist” means an individual licensed by the Board to practice as an environmental health specialist.”

On page 2, in line 1, strike “(i)” and substitute “**(J)**”.

On page 2, after line 21, insert:
“21-301.

(b) This section does not apply to:

(1) An environmental health specialist-in-training PARTICIPATING IN AN ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST-IN-TRAINING PROGRAM OR AN INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATING IN AN APPRENTICESHIP AS provided for under § 21-305 of this subtitle;

(2) A student participating in a field experience as part of an educational program; and

(3) A qualified individual in any of the following job classifications:

(i) Industrial hygienists as defined by the American Industrial Hygiene Association;

(ii) Certified industrial hygienists and industrial hygienists in training as defined by the American Board of Industrial Hygiene;

(iii) Health planners or natural resource planners;

(iv) Building and housing inspectors;

(v) Geologists;

(vi) Chemists;

(vii) Meteorologists;

(viii) Laboratory scientists;

(ix) Professional engineers who are licensed in this State under Title 14 of the Business Occupations and Professions Article and whose normal professional activities are among the activities specified in [§ 21-101(i)] **§ 21-101(J)** of this title;”

On page 3, in line 13, after “Has” strike “obtained” and substitute “**COMPLETED: 1.**”.

On page 3, in line 14, after “OR” insert:

“2. AN APPRENTICESHIP APPROVED BY THE BOARD THAT MEETS THE REQUIREMENTS SET IN REGULATIONS ADOPTED BY THE BOARD; OR”.

On page 5, after line 29, insert:

“21-305.

The Board shall adopt regulations that include:

(1) (i) The establishment of an environmental health specialist-in-training program for applicants to obtain the necessary experience to qualify to take the examination; and

(ii) A condition that a person may not participate in an environmental health specialist-in-training program for more than 3 years, unless granted an extension by the Board; [and]

(2) (i) The establishment of a seasonal environmental health specialist-in-training program for individuals to be temporarily employed as environmental health specialists; and

(ii) A condition that an individual may not participate in a seasonal environmental health specialist-in-training program for more than 6 months within a consecutive 12-month [period.] PERIOD; AND

(3) (I) THE REQUIREMENTS FOR BOARD APPROVAL OF AN APPRENTICESHIP; AND

(II) THE MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM DURATION OF AN APPRENTICESHIP.”

AMENDMENT NO. 3

On page 8, in line 2, strike “October” and substitute “**JULY**”.