



March 2, 2023

Drug Manufacturers - Drug Take-Back Programs (Take It Back Maryland Act) - HB0517
Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chairperson Pena-Melnyk and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

Blue Water Baltimore is a nonprofit organization with a mission to restore the quality of Baltimore's rivers, streams, and Harbor to foster a healthy environment, a strong economy, and thriving communities. **We write today in support of the Take It Back Maryland Act (HB0517).**

Due to old and leaky infrastructure, millions of gallons of raw sewage enter Baltimore's waterways each year. And sewage contains everything that gets flushed down the drain or toilet, including pharmaceuticals. Pharmaceuticals are considered "contaminants of emerging concern" due to the risks they pose to ecological and human health.¹ Once they enter our streams and Harbor via sewage overflows, pharmaceuticals "can disrupt animal biology and behavior, algal growth, and other ecological processes – with harmful cascading effects."²

Pharmaceuticals enter waterways from multiple sources, including pharmaceutical manufacturing facilities and industrial agricultural operations that heavily medicate animals with hormones and antibiotics, as well as through wastewater, since people don't fully metabolize most medications we take. Another common source is the unused drugs that people flush when cleaning out their medicine cabinets.³ This bill attempts to prevent those unused drugs from being flushed into our waterways by increasing awareness of drug take back programs.

Flushing unused drugs is a very common method to dispose of unwanted or expired medications. I recently had a series of ankle surgeries and have several leftover bottles of opioids that I no longer want in my house. My first instinct was to flush them – and I'm a water quality advocate! I share this anecdote because it's important that we not individualize systemic problems. It is not enough to tell people that flushing drugs is bad for the environment and urge them not to do it. We must also create systems and structures that make proper disposal of unused medicine easy for residents and ensure the public knows about these systems.

Fortunately for Maryland residents, there are already hundreds of Drug Take Back (DTB) locations in our state.⁴ However, most people don't know about these services. The Take It Back Maryland Act will fill this education and awareness gap by requiring drug manufacturers to fund an educational

¹ Wenxing Zhao, Gang Yu, Lee Blaney, and Bin Wang. (2021). [Development of emission factors to estimate discharge of typical pharmaceuticals and personal care products from wastewater treatment plants](#). *Science of The Total Environment*, Volume 769.

² Megan L. Fork, Jerker B. Fick, Alexander J. Reisinger, and Emma J. Rosi. (2021). [Dosing the Coast: Baltimore County's leaky pipes are medicating the Chesapeake Bay](#). *Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies*.

³ Harvard Health Publishing. (June 1, 2011). [Drugs in the Water](#). *Harvard Medical School*.

⁴ Pharmaceutical Product Stewardship Work Group. (n.d.) [Locator](#). *MyOldMeds.com*.

campaign to publicize DTB programs and locations; establishing a work group to identify any gaps in the current DTB infrastructure through a geographic, racial, and equity lens; and creating a recurring fund for ongoing education and program expansion.

The U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) agrees that DTB programs are the best option for safe disposal of unused medicine.⁵ But if DTB programs are not available in your area, the FDA also maintains a “flush list” for medications that pose particular dangers to children, adults, or pets who may accidentally or intentionally ingest them if left lying around the house.⁶ The existence of the FDA’s “flush list” emphasizes just how common flushing unused medications is when there are not easy and safe alternatives, as well as the grave dangers posed by failing to provide and publicize easily accessible disposal methods.

The Take It Back Maryland Act will not only help prevent unused medication from entering and polluting our waterways, it will also help reduce overdose deaths in our communities by increasing awareness of and working to expand Maryland’s DTB’s infrastructure. We urge a favorable report on HB0517.

Sincerely,



Taylor Smith-Hams
Advocacy & Outreach Senior Manager

⁵ U.S. Food & Drug Administration. (October 27, 2022). [Drug Disposal: Drug Take Back Locations.](#)

⁶ U.S. Food & Drug Administration. (October 1, 2020). [Drug Disposal: FDA’s Flush List for Certain Medicines.](#)