



Support for Senate Bill 572

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Committee:

The Chesapeake Legal Alliance supports SB 572 because access to clean water is a human right, but is certainly not treated as such right now. Greater transparency and access to data are the first steps to addressing many of the larger and more systemic obstacles to delivering clean water. Without adequate data we cannot understand the full extent of our water problems, much less offer the right solutions. Basic questions abound:

- ❖ How many low income households in Maryland are deprived of something as fundamentally important as clean and safe drinking water?
- ❖ How many low income Marylanders are currently being punished for nothing more than a lack of resources?
- ❖ Are utilities really doing everything they can and should do to prevent deprivation of service or penalizing households?
- ❖ How much would it cost to end the inhumane practice of shutting off a family's water?
- ❖ What are the social, economic, and environmental consequences of budgeting for water differently than all of the other basic and critical municipal services (e.g., taxes)?
- ❖ How many homes are taking full advantage of low income assistance programs or hardship exemptions? Where do we need to target outreach to help these individuals?
- ❖ Why do some communities seem to have less success accessing state and federal grants? What is the reason behind this and what can be done to change it?
- ❖ What percentage of utility revenues come from ratepayers versus other local, state, or federal sources and how does that vary? What role can the General Assembly play in ensuring that greater water infrastructure funding is available to displace pressure on low income ratepayers?
- ❖ Where can infrastructure extension and expansion projects do the most good for public health and water quality?
- ❖ If we wanted to invest in providing safer domestic water supplies for Maryland's lowest income households, how much would that cost and where should we target these efforts?
- ❖ How many utilities are owned by private equity? What are the trends and consequences?

This is just a fraction of important questions that deserve answers. But without data these questions will go unanswered for the policymakers and budget analysts who need much more information to help Marylanders and our environment achieve our clean water goals and needs. This is why we support SB 572. For more information, you may reach Evan Isaacson at evan@chesapeakelegal.org.