Olivia Bartlett, DoTheMostGood

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment

TESTIMONY ON: SB0956: Environment - Water Pollution Control - Protecting State Waters From PFAS Pollution (Protecting State Waters From PFAS Pollution Act)

POSITION: FAVORABLE

HEARING DATE: February 20, 2024

BILL CONTACT: Senator Katie Fry Hester

DoTheMostGood (DTMG) is a progressive grass-roots organization with members in all districts in Montgomery County as well as in several nearby districts. DTMG supports legislation that keeps all residents healthy and safe in a clean environment. Therefore, DTMG strongly supports SB0956 to to restrict discharge of highly toxic PFAS compounds from large industries into our waterways and into wastewater treatment plants. This important legislation will help ensure polluting industries bear responsibility for preventing PFAS contamination in our waterways and drinking water, preventing Maryland taxpayers and families from paying the costs with our health and pocketbooks.

Per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances, commonly known as PFAS, are used in a wide variety of consumer products, from personal care products and non-stick pans to car seats and carpets. They are also used by industries to make things greaseproof and water resistant. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), there is no safe level of PFAS in drinking water. Accordingly, the EPA has proposed a maximum contamination limit of 4 ppt for several PFAS, which is a big step forward from the previous advisory of 70 ppt.

Exposure to even low levels of PFAS is linked to a range of health problems, including:
- Kidney damage, leading to chronic kidney disease or kidney cancer,
- Reduced antibody responses to vaccinations in both children and adults, and
- Increased risk of gestational diabetes, preeclampsia, low birth weight, and childhood obesity

According to Maryland's PFAS Action Plan, 14% of Maryland industries that responded to a survey reported having PFAS sources on-site. In some cases, manufacturers and users of these chemicals are dumping them directly into our rivers, lakes, and streams. Other companies might be "indirectly" discharging PFAS by sending it to treatment plants. This toxic pollution threatens not only our drinking water but also fish and wildlife.

Many drinking water sources in Maryland are already contaminated with PFAS, and it's important for the health of all Marylanders to limit further pollution. The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) found PFAS in 75% of the drinking water it has tested. MDE also issued fish consumption advisories for PFAS from some Maryland waterways. Independent testing has also found alarming levels of PFAS in Maryland's water and seafood. Newer types of PFAS are no safer for human health and the environment than older PFAS, such as PFOA and PFOS, and may travel more easily

through water, resulting in widespread exposure, and thus may pose more risks to human and environmental health.

The best way to address PFAS contamination is to prevent the contamination in the first place. Until the use of PFAS can be phased out, we should do everything we can to keep industries from sending more PFAS-contaminated discharges to our water treatment plants and into our ecosystem. Moreover, existing pollution control technology can capture roughly 99 percent of PFAS in wastewater. Safeguarding against PFAS chemicals as a class is the best way to protect human health. Trying to regulate one chemical at a time will only leave us in an endless game of whack-a-mole.

In 2022, the General Assembly passed the George “Walter” Taylor Act, with broad bi-partisan support, to restrict the use of PFAS in food packaging, rugs and carpets, and firefighting foam in Maryland. It is now time to restrict discharge of toxic PFAS chemicals into Maryland’s water.

SB0956 is the right bill to do that, SB0956
● Does not ban PFAS in industrial processes.
● Aligns with State authority under the Clean Water Act to restrict the discharge of toxic chemicals, including PFAS.
● Ensures large industries that knowingly use PFAS use modern filters to stop their discharge into waterways, stormwater, and to wastewater treatment plants.
● Sets a discharge limit of 4ppt for PFAS, which aligns with EPA recommendations.

Therefore, for all these reasons, DoTheMostGood strongly recommends a **FAVORABLE** report on SB0956.

Respectfully submitted,

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