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SB 572- Collection and Reporting of Drinking Water and Wastewater Documents, Data, and Information – Requirements

February 6, 2024

Education, Energy, and the Environment

FAVORABLE

On behalf of Food & Water Watch and our 44,000 supporters in Maryland, we recommend you issue a favorable report on SB 572 to require water utilities to disclose water affordability metrics annually. This disclosure includes data about water service disconnections and local policies related to water shutoffs and available low-income assistance programs.

Water affordability is a growing statewide problem, as utilities continue to increase water and sewer bills to update aging infrastructure, comply with new regulations necessary to protect public and environmental health, and address the impacts of climate change.

Utilities often disconnect water service when households are unable to afford their water bills. Nationally, we estimate that 15 million households are shutoff in a typical year due to unpaid water bills.¹ We do not know the scope of the crisis in Maryland, and that is why we urge you to support this legislation. Disconnecting water service poses a very real threat to personal wellbeing, and stopping shutoffs is an important public health intervention. Our research with Cornell University found that in 2020, water shutoff moratoria, including the one imposed by the State of Maryland, prevented the spread Covid-19 and saved lives.²

More transparency is urgently needed about water shutoffs to help inform local and state policy decisions. All utilities — including privately owned ones — must track water shutoffs for nonpayment and disclose that information to the public.

Again, we urge a favorable report on SB 572 to inform local and state policies on water affordability and protect the human right to water.

Sincerely,

Jorge Aguilar
Southern Region Director
Food & Water Watch

¹ Food & Water Watch. "America's Secret Water Crisis: National Shutoff Survey Reveals Water Affordability Emergency Affecting Millions." 2018. Available at https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/rpt_1810_watershutoffs-web2.pdf

² Zhang, Xue et al. "Water Shutoff Moratoria Lowered COVID-19 Infection and Death Across U.S. State." *Am J Prev Med.* 2022 Feb; 62(2): 149–156. Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8433038/>