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Environment and Transportation  
Committee

*Subcommittees*

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**Delegate Dana Stein’s Testimony in Support of HB 992**  
**Environment – Delegated Authorities – Well and Septic Program Permits**

Having accurate data is critical to evaluating the quality and delivery of vital public services. This is reflected in recent legislation introduced by Governor Moore—HB 581 Transparent Government Act of 2024—requiring all state agencies to categorize their permits and provide target turnaround times.

One area in need of accurate data that this Committee has heard about frequently in recent years is well and septic permits. These permits are overseen by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) but are delegated to local health departments, or in some instances, county governments.

While some of these delegated programs are run well, others have faced major challenges related to staffing, customer service, or work quality. Last year, this Committee passed legislation requiring MDE and other stakeholders to submit a report on the structure and performance of these delegated authorities.

The Interim Report required by the Environmental Health System Support Act of 2023 found that the existing delegation of authority leads to issues with “consistency, interpretation of the regulations, timing, understanding the reasoning for decisions, oversight, and accountability.” Additionally, the report found that the average time it takes for local jurisdictions to approve permits varies from one day to one month, often without adequate and consistent communication between the local health departments and permit applicants.

I proposed HB 992 to ensure key performance data is being provided by local jurisdictions to MDE so they can assess what is happening with these programs.

My bill simply requires each local delegated authority to submit a schedule for their well and septic permit review times to MDE for approval. Once the basic schedule has been approved, a delegated authority must submit well and septic permit data to the Department for review.

I recognize every jurisdiction is different and that permit turnaround times can vary from county to county for valid reasons. I am not looking to create a mandatory permit turnaround time or impose a "one size fits all" solution.

But, I do think it is critical that we have this data, including permit turnaround times, in order to evaluate the performance of a local program. Otherwise, MDE cannot make an honest assessment about whether a program is meeting the needs of their constituents and providing the best customer

service possible. This bill is only asking for very basic data that every program should already have and are hopefully using when making management decisions.

This data does not have to come through the reporting process described in my bill; I am open to using an existing process or an alternative proposed process if suggested. It is important however, that this data be provided to MDE, so the agency can provide adequate oversight.

HB 992 provides a basic, yet meaningful mechanism to promote accountability and transparency in well and septic permit turnaround times. For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report.