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The Maryland House of Delegates
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Delegate Dana Stein Testimony in Support of HB 1509

Baltimore Regional Water Governance Model Workgroup - Established

Last year, House Bill 843 set up the Baltimore Regional Water Governance Task Force. At the recommendation of Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott and Baltimore County Executive John Olszewski, we set up a task force that was charged with “recommend[ing] the governance model best suited for water and wastewater systems in the Baltimore region and the necessary legislation and funding to establish the recommended model.” I was honored to be chosen to represent the House of Delegates on the Task Force by Speaker Adrienne Jones.

The Task Force met seven times during the interim and reviewed extensive materials provided by the consultant. We considered different options for changing the governance model of the water and wastewater systems. These options included a regional governance model in which Baltimore City and Baltimore County systems are merged into a regional entity, along the lines of WSSC, or keeping the current systems but making some changes.

Ultimately, the Task Force did not make a categorical recommendation. The Task Force acknowledged that a regional governance model showed promise in addressing regional concerns about the existing governance structure which the other options did not.

But, we didn’t have enough time to perform the requisite due diligence that recommending a major change such as a regional governance model required. The Task Force didn’t have time to analyze and assess the eight criteria required by the House Bill and other threshold issues (an equity study, workforce analysis, operation and maintenance decision making, capital improvement planning, compliance coordination, debt service research, pension & benefits research, stormwater research, etc.) in time for the January 30, 2024, report deadline.

So, the task force recommended that this due diligence be done by a subsequent working group over the course of the next three years from the date of issuance of this report, with the results informing the best regional governance structure for the regional utility.

The new workgroup would have the same composition as the task force that was set up last year – a total of 13 members including five appointed by the Mayor of Baltimore, three by the Baltimore County Executive, two by the Governor, one House and one Senate member, and one member from

Anne Arundel County, Carroll County, Howard County, or Harford County. The workgroup would have three years to do its study and report back by June 30, 2027.

In its report, the task force requested that the State provide resources for legal counsel, since neither the City nor County's law departments are in a position to advise the workgroup; and also, to hire experts in equity analysis. As a result, the bill is requesting \$500,000 to support the workgroup.

I urge you to vote favorably on HB 1509.