

**Written Testimony re: Baltimore Regional Water Governance Model Workgroup, HB 1509
(Hearing Tuesday 3/12/24 3 pm)**

Submitted by: Prof. Jaime Lee, Member of the Baltimore Right to Water Coalition, Professor of Law at the University of Baltimore, and Director of UB Law Community Development Clinic

To the Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

Baltimore City is today putting into action some of the most closely watched water justice policies in the country.

The Baltimore Right to Water Coalition has spent the past 9 years designing innovative policies that have made Baltimore City a nationwide model for water affordability, resident-based reform, shutoffs protections, and keeping its water system public.

As a law professor who studies water access, good governance, and business law, and as a Coalition member, I urge that HB 1509 to be amended to ensure that the Baltimore Regional Water Governance Model Workgroup continues this water justice work – and not roll back the crucial gains recently made – by:

- Explicitly studying the disparate impacts of any future governance models on particular racial groups
- Preserving and expanding all existing worker and low-income ratepayer protections, including:
 - The Water4All program
 - shutoff protections
 - The Office of the Water Customer Advocate
 - The sewage onsite support (SOS) program and the expedited reimbursement program
 - The ban on water privatization (Baltimore City Charter Ballot Question E)
- Clearly prohibiting all forms of privatization by adding: **“It is the intent of the General Assembly that the workgroup will strengthen the governance of the Baltimore region’s water and wastewater utility under public ownership, management and operation.”**
- Ensuring representation on the workgroup of low-income water customers and workers
- Ensuring robust and meaningful public input.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important matter.

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