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SB0192 - Property Tax - Tax Sales – Revisions

January 22, 2025

Budget and Taxation Committee

Position: SUPPORT

On behalf of Food & Water Watch and our 44,000 supporters in Maryland, we support SB 192 as introduced and request that you issue a ***favorable*** report to protect all homes, including renters and households without homeownership status, from tax sales over water bills.

SB 192 would stop the harmful practice of selling homes including renter-occupied and other non-homeowner-occupied residential property, at tax sale to collect unpaid water and sewer bills. The legislation would expand important protections that already exist in Baltimore City to the entire state. The General Assembly passed the Water Taxpayer Protection Act unanimously in 2019 to protect all Baltimore residents and places of worship in the city from tax sale due to unpaid and unaffordable water bills. It is time to extend those protections to the rest of Maryland's residents.

Many water systems never use tax sales to collect unpaid water bills. For example, Maryland's largest water system, the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, cannot use tax sale to collect unpaid water bills. However, currently, 15 counties include water and sewer bills in tax sale. The tax sale process can lead to foreclosure and eviction for affected residents. Many renters are often not responsible for directly paying their water bill, and despite being up to date on their rent, they could lose their housing through this process with little legal recourse.

Again, we strongly support this legislation and urge you to issue a ***favorable report*** on a clean SB 192. No one, regardless of homeownership status, should lose their home over water bills.

Sincerely,

Jorge Aguilar
Southern Region Director
Food & Water Watch