



January 17, 2025

Environment - Interjurisdictional Watersheds - Flood Management (SB 42)
Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

Blue Water Baltimore is a nonprofit organization with a mission to protect and restore the quality of Baltimore's rivers, streams, and Harbor to foster a healthy environment, a strong economy, and thriving communities. **We write today in support of SB 42 and urge a favorable report from this committee.**

Blue Water Baltimore is home to the Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper, and our licensed jurisdiction through the international Waterkeeper Alliance includes the entirety of the Patapsco and Back River watersheds. This means that we are uniquely positioned among environmental NGOs in the region to focus on the health and prosperity of these waterways, and the people who live, work, and recreate around them. **This legislation has direct impacts on the Jones Falls, Gwynns Falls, and Herring Run streams, which flow throughout our licensed watershed jurisdictions in the Baltimore region.**

These streams feed the Patapsco and Back Rivers, two of the most polluted tributaries to the Chesapeake Bay as evidenced from our routine water quality monitoring and assessments from the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science.¹² Many of the longstanding challenges with water quality and failing water infrastructure in the Baltimore region are rooted in decades of inequitable infrastructure investments and environmental racism. **Polluted streams and rivers are the manifestation of these systemic problems, and the people of Baltimore are being robbed of their inherent right to clean water every day.**

The global effects of climate change vary by location, but the IPCC's latest report coupled with NOAA's most recent precipitation data release paints a grim picture for the mid-Atlantic region and Baltimore in particular.³⁴ Residents contend with both coastal and pluvial flooding on a regular basis, issues that are only getting worse as the mid-Atlantic region experiences higher average annual temperatures, increased annual precipitation volume, and more intense storm events. **These conditions lead to flooding, sewage backups into homes, and sewage overflows into our local waterways.**

In order to rectify those long-standing problems, billions of dollars in taxpayer funds have been used to upgrade our sanitary sewer collection systems and install more green stormwater infrastructure to curb the pollution surging into our waterways every time it rains. But this work, undertaken by municipalities like Baltimore City and Baltimore County, is inefficient and ultimately unsuccessful if it is done without cross-jurisdictional collaboration. For example, improving upstream pipe capacity can actually cause increased flooding or sewage overflows in downstream communities if the pipes in those downstream neighborhoods aren't concurrently upgraded to handle increased flows. The watersheds

¹ Baltimore Water Watch. 2025. Blue Water Baltimore. <http://www.BaltimoreWaterWatch.org>.

² 2023 Chesapeake Bay Report Card. University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science. <https://ecoreportcard.org/report-cards/chesapeake-bay/watershed-health/>

³ IPCC, 2023: Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, pp. 1-34, doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.001

⁴ 2023 U.S. Climate Normals Update: Version 1.0.1. <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/products/land-based-station/us-climate-normals>

that connect our headwater streams to the Baltimore Harbor don't stop at the City-County line; the stormwater and sewage keep flowing regardless of who "owns" the pipes. **It's time to acknowledge the inherent interconnectedness of our infrastructure systems and approach sewer and stormwater management holistically across the entire watershed.**

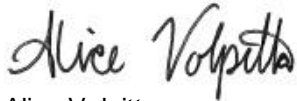
This legislation will:

- Codify and strengthen protections for critical watersheds, including the Jones Falls, Gwynns Falls, and Herring Run;
- Designate these streams and their tributaries as interjurisdictional flood hazard watersheds; and
- Ensure that flood management practices are consistent across jurisdictions, protecting our waterways from pollution, flooding, and the increasing impacts of climate change.

This legislation is needed to enhance communication and collaboration about critical infrastructure projects that cross municipal boundaries, for the good of our communities and shared local waterways.

For these reasons, Blue Water Baltimore respectfully requests this committee issue a favorable report on SB 42.

Sincerely,



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