



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 165 - Environment - Environment - On-Site Wastewater Systems - Requirements for Inspection and Pumping Services and Implementation Dates

February 3, 2026

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB165 on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection organization serving Maryland's Eastern Shore, with more than 2,700 members. Our mission is to protect our waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, education, and engagement

In 17 of Maryland's 24 counties, nitrogen pollution from septic systems exceeds nitrogen pollution from municipal wastewater treatment plants. Failing septic systems contribute excessive nitrogen, phosphorus, and bacterial pollution to both groundwater and surface waters, threatening natural resources and public health. Public health research from the University of Maryland has also found significant positive associations between high concentrations of septic systems in floodplains and increased infections from *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella*. Septic system failures can result from aging infrastructure, changing soil conditions, compromised drain fields, flooding, and other factors. Other research confirms that that improper design, maintenance, or location of private wells and septic systems contributed to 67% of reported outbreaks from groundwater contamination from 1971 and 2008". (Wallender et al., 2014)¹ **Without regular inspections, failing systems can go undetected for decades, increasing nutrient pollution in local waterways and contaminating nearby drinking water wells. SB165/HB146 is designed to protect public health and the environment by ensuring septic systems are properly maintained, inspected, and monitored.**

As the Chester Riverkeeper, work with residents of Kent and Queen Anne's counties — because of the area's rural character, a large percentage of residents rely on septic systems. Many homeowners have never had their systems inspected, leaving both current and future residents vulnerable to exposure from coliform bacteria and elevated nitrate and phosphate pollution. In many cases, this pollution poses a direct human health risk not only to homeowners and tenants, but to the broader community and our rivers.

Years of water quality testing show that the Chester River suffers from elevated fecal enterococci levels —likely from failing septic systems — that prevent waterways from meeting clean water standards and limits recreational use. Establishing regular septic inspection protocols will provide Maryland residents with assurance that their systems are functioning properly and will help ensure cleaner, safer, and more swimmable rivers for future generations. **We thank Senator Brooks for this legislation, and ShoreRivers respectfully urges the committee to adopt Senate Bill 165.**

Sincerely,
Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper on behalf of **ShoreRivers:**

¹ <https://api.drum.lib.umd.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/5522cf74-e903-4959-83f6-d3c4cd28597d/content>

ShoreRivers

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