



January 30, 2026

## **SB165 – Environment – On-Site Wastewater Systems – Requirements for Inspection and Pumping Services and Implementation Dates**

Hearing Date: February 3, 2025

Position: **FAVORABLE**

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

Waterkeepers Chesapeake respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE report on SB165**. Waterkeepers Chesapeake is a network of Waterkeeper programs across the Chesapeake and coastal bays region, with 12 Waterkeeper members located in Maryland. Waterkeepers are local advocates working with their communities to protect access to clean water and to restore waterways. These Waterkeepers represent thousands of Maryland residents who rely on on-site wastewater (septic) systems.

SB165 will ensure that septic systems are properly inspected and pumped out prior to property transfer or when a new tenant occupies the property. Inspecting and pumping out septic systems is crucial for maintaining their functionality, preventing environmental hazards, and avoiding costly repairs. Inspections and regular pump outs will prevent system failures, protect public health, better protect our local environment, save costs and extend the lifespan of the septic system, and maintain property values.

Maryland has over 420,000 septic systems. 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 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)<sup>1</sup> Without regular inspections, failing systems can go undetected for decades, increasing nutrient pollution in local waterways and contaminating nearby drinking water wells.

Years of water quality testing by the Waterkeepers throughout Maryland show that many waterways, especially in rural areas, suffer from elevated bacteria levels — likely from failing

septic systems — that prevent waterways from meeting clean water standards and limits recreational use. Many homeowners may not even realize that their systems aren't functioning properly. 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.

Waterkeepers Chesapeake requests a FAVORABLE report on SB165 which will protect public health and the environment by ensuring septic systems are properly maintained, inspected, and monitored.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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