



HB1444 - Washington County - On-Site Sewage Disposal System Regulations - Exemptions

March 11, 2026

Position: Unfavorable

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee,

Arundel Rivers Federation, Clean Water Action, and ShoreRivers respectfully oppose HB1444 which would allow the Washington County Health Department to exempt an owner of certain residential properties from compliance with all or part of on-site sewage disposal regulations, when compliance is deemed “unduly burdensome.”

Our existing laws and regulations serve an important purpose to protect drinking water, surface waterways, and public health from the dangers of untreated human waste. These standards are based on decades of experience and science showing how pathogens, nitrogen, and other pollutants from failing or inadequate septic systems can contaminate groundwater and nearby waterways. Allowing exemptions from these rules creates the potential for wastewater systems that do not adequately protect water quality or public health.

This concern is particularly significant in rural areas, where many residents rely on private wells for drinking water. Weakening septic system requirements in these areas increases the risk that contamination from improperly treated wastewater could reach drinking water supplies or local streams. While the bill requires documentation from a licensed professional and limits exemptions to individual property owners, it also allows exemptions to be renewed indefinitely, which could result in long-term avoidance of regulations intended to ensure safe wastewater treatment.

Rather than creating a pathway to bypass these important safeguards, the State should strengthen programs that help homeowners repair or replace failing systems. Other resources exist to help fix systems, including the septic portion of the Bay Restoration Fund and DHCD’s program for low income residents. More money needs to be allocated to the Bay Restoration Fund to pay for septic system repairs and upgrades. Financial support for upgrading, fixing, and replacing septic systems is a more

appropriate path forward, instead of exempting systems from existing rules that protect human health and the environment.

Thank you and we urge an unfavorable report.

Emily Ranson
Clean Water Action
eranson@cleanwater.org

Elle Bassett
Arundel Rivers Federation
elle@arundelrivers.org

Annie Richards
ShoreRivers
arichards@shorerivers.org