



March 12, 2026

**Wastewater Treatment Plants - Discharges - Monitoring, Reporting, and Requirements (HB1621)
Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and honorable members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee:

Blue Water Baltimore is a local 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. **On behalf of Blue Water Baltimore, I write to express our support for HB1621.**

Blue Water Baltimore, home of the Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper, is part of the global Waterkeeper Alliance that is composed of over 300 watchdog organizations with a mission to protect and restore waterways all over the world. Our licensed Waterkeeper jurisdiction includes the entirety of the Patapsco and Back River watersheds, which means that Blue Water Baltimore focuses on the health and prosperity of these waterways, and that of the people who live, work, and recreate around them.

The Patapsco and Back Rivers are 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 These rivers accept the effluent from two of Maryland's largest wastewater treatment plants, the Patapsco and Back River WWTPs. **The health of the entire Chesapeake Bay hinges upon the performance of these two facilities, but when there are problems that cause these plants to discharge too much pollution into the rivers, it is our members and our local communities who are most severely impacted and pay the highest price.**

While Maryland has made meaningful progress toward addressing pollution from our wastewater sector over the past two decades, the Patapsco and Back River WWTPs have historically been major contributors of pollution to our local waterways. These two plants, now operating under legally-binding Consent Decree agreements, are coming back into compliance with the terms of their discharge permits; but there are still significant gaps in transparency and accountability that would be addressed by this bill.

The proposed legislation aims to implement important wastewater sector reform measures, including the following:

- 1) **Enhanced transparency and accountability** on the many sanitary sewer industrial pretreatment permits that are otherwise currently blind spots to elected officials and the public.

¹ Baltimore Water Watch. 2026. Blue Water Baltimore. <http://www.BaltimoreWaterWatch.org>.

² 2025 Chesapeake Bay Report Card. University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science. <https://ecoreportcard.org/report-cards/chesapeake-bay/bay-health/>

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- 2) **Protection of public health** through incorporation of numeric "Bacterial Action Levels" into WWTP effluent monitoring that would protect communities from episodic discharges, with immediate public notification whenever exceedances occur.
- 3) Publication of existing bacteria data and **clear public notifications** that explain the nature of bypass events and any potential impacts to ecological and public health.
- 4) **Stricter limitations and guidelines** on MDE's decisions about which facilities are permitted to generate nutrient trading credits, based upon cumulative pollution impacts over periods of permit noncompliance.
- 5) Implementation of practices designed to **reduce harmful and nuisance odors** emanating from WWTPs.

Blue Water Baltimore is in full support of the spirit of HB1621. We are looking forward to the opportunity to work with the sponsor, Maryland Department of the Environment, and other stakeholders to further strengthen the bill.

Sincerely,
Alice Volpitta
Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper
Blue Water Baltimore