



HB1621 - Wastewater Treatment Plants - Discharges - Monitoring, Reporting, and Requirements

Hearing: Friday, March 13, 2026

Position: Favorable with Amendments

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

Waterkeepers Chesapeake and the below signed organizations respectfully submit this favorable with amendments testimony on HB1621 - Wastewater Treatment Plants - Discharges - Monitoring, Reporting, and Requirements. These organizations are in strong support of the spirit of the bill and the measures outlined that would strengthen protections for the environment and public health.

Maryland has made meaningful progress toward addressing pollution from our wastewater sector over the past two decades. However, continuing to strengthen monitoring, transparency, and accountability is essential to ensuring that our wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs) operate in such a way that protects both public and environmental health.

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.
- 2) 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.

Robust monitoring is essential in the fight for water quality protection. Expanding monitoring will assist the state in better understanding the presence of pollutants and be more prepared to take future action when needed - effectively managing risks and identifying emerging threats to our waterways and communities. Daily bacteria monitoring and reporting is feasible and the Department has begun publicizing such data already. The bill's requirement for daily publication of bacteria levels would substantially improve transparency into a key pollutant over the status quo of monthly reporting on a federal database with a several month delay.

It's important to note that some key components of this bill related to enhanced transparency and accountability are similar in purpose to legislation that has already been passed, but not yet fully implemented. For example, 9-321.3.(C)(4) echoes legislation (HB417) that was [already passed in 2019](#) that requires MDE to promulgate regulations to modernize sewage overflow or bypass reporting. This bill is a good reminder that 7 years later, those regulations still have not been developed.

Pollution trading has not worked in Maryland and is a policy that should be considerably altered and curtailed. This bill is a small step in the right direction in that regard.

Waterkeepers Chesapeake and the organizations signed below look forward to working with the sponsor, MDE, and other stakeholders to support and strengthen the bill.

Sincerely,
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Brent Walls, Program Director and Upper Potomac Riverkeeper
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Trey Sherard, Anacostia Riverkeeper
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