

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Essex Middle River Civic Council (EMRCC), I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill 1621.

The Essex Middle River Civic Council represents more than 20 individual community associations and numerous associate members throughout the Essex and Middle River communities of eastern Baltimore County. Many of the neighborhoods we represent are waterfront and river adjacent communities that live directly downstream of major wastewater infrastructure and rely on the health of Back River and the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

For decades our communities have experienced the direct impacts of wastewater treatment plant failures, bypass events, and ongoing water quality concerns. These issues affect recreation, local waterways, and the overall quality of life for residents in our communities.

Just as troubling has been the lack of timely, clear, and transparent information when these incidents occur. In many cases, the only indication residents have that a bypass is occurring is a flashing warning light located in the middle of Back River. Beyond that signal, the surrounding communities receive little to no information about what occurred, why the event happened, what was discharged, or what the potential impacts may be. Communities living directly downstream of this infrastructure should not be left guessing when events occur that may affect their waterways and quality of life.

House Bill 1621 addresses many of the transparency and accountability issues that residents and community organizations like ours have been raising for years. EMRCC, along with other environmental and community organizations in our region, specifically advocated for legislation that improves monitoring, public notification, and transparency around wastewater treatment plant operations.

The provisions in this bill that require monitoring for PFAS, hormones, and bacteria, real time public alerts when bacterial action levels are exceeded, and

clear public explanations of bypasses or treatment failures are critically important for communities like ours.

Equally important is the creation of publicly accessible reporting and databases that allow residents to see what pollutants are entering the wastewater system and whether permit holders are complying with their requirements. Transparency is essential for rebuilding public trust and ensuring that wastewater treatment facilities are operating responsibly and within their permits.

Communities downstream of major wastewater infrastructure should not have to rely on delayed reports or outside sources to learn what is entering the waterways they live beside. Residents deserve timely information, accountability, and meaningful oversight when discharges occur.

For our communities in Essex and Middle River, this is not an abstract policy issue. It is a real and ongoing environmental and public health concern that has affected our waterways and our quality of life. This legislation represents an important step toward ensuring the transparency and accountability our residents have been asking for.

For these reasons, the Essex Middle River Civic Council respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 1621.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Josh Sines

President

Essex Middle River Civic Council