

JEFFRIE E. LONG, JR.  
*Legislative District 27B*  
Calvert and Prince George's Counties

Environment and Transportation  
Committee

*Vice Chair*  
Southern Maryland Delegation



The Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen Street, Room 209  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3398  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3398  
Jeffrie.Long@house.maryland.gov

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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**Chair, Madam Vice Chair, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,**

House Bill 1196 before you today reflects a collaborative and carefully considered amendment process. The version you have in your file is not the original bill draft, and as such, it does not correspond precisely to the initial fiscal note. The amended bill is the product of meaningful collaboration between the Maryland Department of the Environment, affected residents, and environmental advocates. As revised, the legislation is structured to carry a more neutral fiscal impact while preserving its core public health objectives.

HB1196 addresses a critical regulatory gap that limits the Maryland Department of the Environment's ability to fully ensure the safety and quality of drinking water for families across our State. You will hear testimony today describing ongoing conditions within certain mobile home communities throughout Maryland. These accounts highlight how current limitations in the enforcement of federal and state safe drinking water regulations have constrained MDE's ability to intervene effectively on behalf of residents.

This legislation responds to persistent issues associated with drinking water delivered to residents in mobile home communities, where water is frequently sourced from wells and groundwater and supplied through small community treatment systems operated and managed by private owners. Residents often pay separate fees for water service, yet many have experienced prolonged service disruptions, as well as discoloration, foul-smelling, and sediment-laden water flowing from their faucets for years. In some cases, residents have reported associated health concerns.

The federal government, through the United States Environmental Protection Agency, establishes national regulations and standards governing the safety and quality of drinking water under the Safe Drinking Water Act. These standards apply to municipalities, quasi-governmental agencies such as the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission, and small community systems that are both publicly and privately owned. The federal government then grants states primary enforcement authority, commonly referred to as primacy, to implement and enforce those standards.

Under the Safe Drinking Water Act, 49 states, all U.S. territories, and the Navajo Nation have been granted primacy. Within the Act, however, there exists a category known as the National Secondary Drinking Water Regulations. These standards address aesthetic qualities of water, including taste, color, odor, and sediment. While the EPA classifies these regulations as non-

enforceable federal guidelines, states retain the authority to adopt and enforce them at the state level.

The issue before us is that Maryland has not yet taken the necessary regulatory steps to authorize the enforcement of these secondary drinking water standards. Nearly twenty other states have done so, recognizing that persistent aesthetic contamination can signal deeper infrastructure and water quality concerns that materially affect residents' daily lives. HB1196 begins the process necessary for Maryland to evaluate and move toward enforcement authority in this area.

The amended version of HB1196 establishes a structured, data-driven approach by directing the development of an action plan that includes:

- An analysis of other states currently enforcing secondary drinking water regulations.
- Identification of communities experiencing elevated concentrations of contaminants affecting odor, taste, discoloration, and sediment.
- A decision-making framework outlining the benefits, implementation challenges, and regulatory considerations associated with adopting enforceable secondary standards.

This is a complex regulatory matter. The purpose of this legislation is not to impose immediate mandates, but to create a deliberate pathway that equips the State with the information necessary to make informed policy decisions that protect Maryland residents.

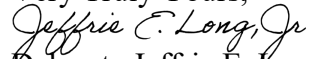
The testimony you will hear today represents only a portion of those impacted. Many residents living with unsafe or unacceptable water conditions are reluctant to speak publicly out of fear of retaliation or displacement. We also recognize that MDE staff, who work diligently within existing statutory constraints, have expressed frustration at their limited authority in addressing recurring complaints. We extend our sincere appreciation to MDE for their responsiveness and collaboration in shaping a responsible and workable approach.

We must also acknowledge the lived reality of families who continue to receive water in their homes that none of us would consider acceptable for our own families. When we consider this issue, we ask the Committee to reflect on what each of us would expect if our own household water supply were discolored, foul-smelling, or unreliable for years at a time.

HB1196 provides a thoughtful first step toward closing a regulatory gap and ensuring that Maryland has the tools necessary to address these conditions responsibly.

For these reasons, we respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 1196.

Very Truly Yours,

  
Delegate Jeffrie E. Long, Jr.