

Protect Local Control of Baltimore's Water, Sewer, Stormwater System Group Sign-On Letter

October 26, 2026

Dear Mayor Brandon Scott, Comptroller Bill Henry, and other honorable members of the Baltimore Water Regional Governance Work Group,

We, the undersigned organizations, ask you to preserve local control of our water, sewer and stormwater system as you consider governance changes through the creation of a new Water Department and any city-county governance structure. We ask you to:

(1) Reject any form of regional authority and privatization.

The City should retain local control of its water and sewer systems, its largest assets, to ensure a change in governance won't deepen inequities. Studies have repeatedly found that city residents pay more than county residents do for basic water service. The city should renegotiate its intermunicipal contracts to ensure more equity in how costs are allocated. The previous regional governance task force identified major issues with a regional authority, including bond refinancing, that could lead to major rate hikes. These issues have not been addressed publicly by the work group. Similarly, privatization, including private operating contracts, are associated with higher costs and must be rejected outright. The city should make a plan to return outsourced functions to city operation.

(2) Preserve and expand existing protections.

The city council must retain its power to legislate protections for residents. The city must commit to maintain and expand its existing worker and resident protections, including collective bargaining agreements, the Water4All water affordability program, water shutoff protections, and the Office of Customer Advocacy and Appeals.

Baltimore City has worked to address water affordability problems with shutoff protections and special water affordability plans for low-income residents through the Water Accountability and Equity Act. Any new structure must seek to expand – not remove or replace – the existing programs and protections.

(3) Include stormwater.

You must include the stormwater system in the new Water Department and conversations on regional collaboration. Other cities have seen stormwater become a stranded asset, at least temporarily, during major structural changes because they failed to account for it. Stormwater is a function that fits well within a new Water Department because of colocation of wastewater collection pipes and stormwater drains. Stormwater is also best managed at the regional level to help prevent the flooding that has devastated many neighborhoods in the city.

(4) Provide a Racial Equity Study for any major changes to the water system

We are concerned that the Regional Governance Work Group is not properly studying how changes in governance will affect Black residents of Baltimore. Analyzing how a change in governance of the water and sewer system will affect Black residents, who make up over 60% of the city's population, and water affordability for all Baltimore residents is a responsible way to allocate city funds. Baltimore's water affordability crisis has and will continue to have a disproportionate and detrimental impact on the city's Black neighborhoods. In 2020, water bills in Baltimore exceeded two percent of median income (which is the affordability threshold for water) in 131 of 200 census tracts—108 of which were majority-Black.

The consultants working with the Regional Governance Work Group should perform a racial equity study of the governance model chosen. Racial equity develops goals and outcomes that will result in improvements for all groups, but the strategies are targeted based on the needs of a particular group. Given that water affordability, shutoffs, and water quality issues disproportionately affect Black Baltimore residents there is a need to ensure that a new governance model will not enhance any of these issues for Black Baltimore residents.

Sincerely,

1199 SEIU

Baltimore Teachers Union

Baltimore Green Justice Workers Cooperative (BGJWC)

Baltimore Transit Equity Coalition

Clean Water Action

Community Development Network of MD

Community Law Center

Economic Action Maryland Fund

Food & Water Watch

Greater Mount Holly CDC

Locust Point Community Garden

Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service

NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF)

Network for Developing Conscious Communities

**North Avenue and Hilton Street Business and
Community Task Force**

Public Justice Center

The SOS Fund

**Univ. of Baltimore School of Law Community
Development Clinic**