April 26, 2023

Dear Honorable Governor Wes Moore, Senate President Bill Ferguson, Speaker Adrienne Jones, Mayor Brandon Scott, County Executive Johnny Olszewski, and BMC Chair and County Executive Calvin Ball III,

In April 2023, the Maryland State legislature passed HB-843/SB-880, which created a Baltimore Regional Water Governance Task Force (Task Force) charged with recommending a new governance model for the Baltimore water and sewer system with the purpose of informing potential state legislation on the issue. While we support efforts to improve Baltimore residents’ access to safe, affordable, and reliable water and wastewater treatment, we are concerned that the proposed Task Force will not address the systemic problems, including the lack of funding, that have plagued Baltimore's water and sewer systems.

As the legislation empowers you to select the members of the Task Force, we ask for you to select individuals who represent low-income ratepayers and union workers. These critical groups should have a seat at the table to ensure that those most vulnerable to changes in a governance structure will have a direct voice in considerations which will impact their future. We believe that having directly impacted people like low-income ratepayers, local community organizations which represent ratepayers, and representatives of union workers on the Task Force will create the best result for the City, County, and other affected jurisdictions.

We also believe that in order for the Task Force to protect residents’ access to safe, affordable water, you should appoint task force members who will prioritize the following:

1. Conduct a racial equity impact assessment and an economic equity impact assessment.
2. Include multiple public hearings and a public comment process that is open and accessible.
3. Limit its study to public sector solutions that will exclude private for-profit ownership or operation, protect democratic decision-making and the rights of workers and residents, and not undermine or conflict with existing local water
affordability laws, sewage backup assistance programs, and charter protections already approved by voters; and

4. Recommend an expanded timeline that will allow for necessary reviews, including a proper economic and racial equity analysis regarding the impact of changing the governance of the system.

Solving the problems confronting the Baltimore region’s water and sewer system requires thoughtful analysis that examines multiple alternatives and weighs the various costs and benefits. Issues such as racial equity, the fiscal health of Baltimore City and Baltimore County, water affordability, and the environment must be thoroughly considered and addressed. Please appoint affected low-income ratepayers and union representatives to the task force and direct your appointees to follow the above principles.

Sincerely,

AFT-Maryland
Blue Water Baltimore
Chapman Forest Foundation
Chesapeake Legal Alliance
Clean Water Action
Community Development Clinic, University of Baltimore School of Law
Doctors for Camp Closure
Food & Water Watch
Friends of Swann Park
Glen Echo Heights Mobilization
Gwynns Falls Community Association
Jews United for Justice
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF)
Our Revolution Maryland
Progressive Maryland
SANIPLAN
St. Mary’s River Watershed Association
The 6th Branch

www.HoCoClimateAction.org