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The Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal  
Bays Critical Areas

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

## The Future of Baltimore's Water

Dear Neighbor,

I am writing to update you on a process that began during the General Assembly earlier this year to study our water and sewer systems. In April, SB880 was signed into law to create the Baltimore Regional Water Governance Task Force.

I have championed the access to clean, safe and affordable water as a human right for all Marylanders, especially our most vulnerable constituents since 2014. I was deeply concerned by the Detroit Water and Sewage Department (DWSD) decision to commence the largest residential water shutoff in U.S. history. That year DWSD terminated water service to over 20,000 Detroit residents for lack of payment, without regard to residents' health needs or ability to pay. I sponsored legislation the following year to ban water shut offs for seniors, households with young children and persons with disabilities. While we were not successful, I continued to look for policy reforms in this area and came to understand that shut offs were just the "tip of the iceberg."

Not long thereafter, I learned that water-related tax sales and foreclosures had an even more draconic impact on neighborhoods in Detroit. Combined with hearing concerns from my constituents about unaffordable and incorrect water bills, I worked with advocates and ratepayers to successfully ban the sale of homes and places of worship at tax sale over unpaid water bills in Baltimore City. Together, we have worked to make water more affordable and accessible in the Baltimore region.

The Task Force has met five times this fall to develop a recommendation, and the draft recommendation just came out on Friday. We know our water and sewer systems have

challenges, and that's why I welcomed the opportunity to explore ways to improve collaboration between the City and the County to address those issues. I know the holidays are coming and you may not have time to read the [141-page report](#). This is why I am here.

The Draft Task Force report provides a good deal of information about the various ways municipal and regional water systems operate. However, I have some questions that I hope the Task force will include in its final draft. I offer them in the spirit of having all the information we, as policymakers at the state and local level, need to make good decisions about the future of the Baltimore Region's water.

The report recommends leasing the water and sewer systems to a new regional authority, and it identifies multiple "threshold issues" that would need to be resolved before such a move could be made. Does this mean that the Task Force has not yet determined whether it is legally or fiscally viable to lease the systems to a new authority and that decision will be made at a future date?

Shortly, I will send a letter to the Task Force outlining that and other questions that I trust will be answered and will inform and guide the final recommendation. Greatest among them is:

*What will be the total cost to lease the water and sewer systems to a new authority for Baltimore City and the households and businesses who use the system? The draft report identifies \$325 million to \$735 million in potential costs to refinance the existing water debt at current market rates. Other outstanding questions involve: how a lease to a new authority would affect workers and their pensions, and the fiscal situation of the City and County governments.*

I have expressed my hopes and concerns, and you can as well.

There are two more virtual task force meetings with opportunities for spoken testimony:

- Monday January 8 from 6 to 9 PM - <https://zoom.us/j/97458075394?pwd=Y2F3NytiOWlmcWl6dXliLzJucE15UT09#success>
- Thursday January 25 from 6 to 9 PM - <https://zoom.us/j/96579992809?pwd=UnBPS241cW9idVlXb20vR2pzT29XUT09>

You can also submit a written comment on the draft report by emailing the Task Force at [WaterGovernance@baltimorecity.gov](mailto:WaterGovernance@baltimorecity.gov) and [watergovernance@baltimorecountymd.gov](mailto:watergovernance@baltimorecountymd.gov). The deadline for public comment on the draft report is just around the corner: Friday January 5 at 5 PM.

I hope you and your loved ones have a joyful holiday season.

In Partnership,

Senator Mary Washington