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Baltimore City and Baltimore County Leaders Announce Landmark Legislation to Create Regional Water Governance Task Force

New state legislation would create Task Force to recommend a modern framework for the region's water and wastewater utilities which operates under half-century old agreement

ANNAPOLIS, MD. (Tuesday, January 31, 2023) — Baltimore Mayor Brandon M. Scott and Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski today joined State Senator Jill P. Carter, State Senator Charles Sydnor, Delegate Stephanie Smith, and Delegate Eric Ebersole to announce state legislation to create a Task Force on Regional Water and Wastewater.

This new Task Force would be charged with making recommendations to modernize the governance of the region's water and wastewater utilities — which currently operate under half-century old agreements — to help ensure residents efficiently, equitably, and sustainably receive high-quality water and sewerage services.

"Together, we are securing a brighter future for all through the creation of the Water Governance Task Force. This innovative legislation will ensure efficient, equitable, and sustainable delivery of essential services to our residents," **said Baltimore City Mayor Brandon M. Scott.** "By modernizing the governance of water and wastewater utilities, we are making a bold move towards a better future. I am honored to stand alongside my colleagues in supporting this critical initiative."

"We best serve all our residents when we work together to find regional solutions to our regional challenges. The agreement that governs our shared water and wastewater utilities

is older than the Mayor and myself and has not been updated since 1972 — it is time to bring us into the 21st century,” **said Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski**. “This Task Force will chart a shared vision for a modern, efficient, and equitable systems that reflect our region’s incredible growth over the past half century and supports us for decades to come. I thank Mayor Scott for his partnership and shared commitment to these challenges – and I look forward to identifying the best path forward for all our residents.”

“This is an exciting moment to modernize, expand and strengthen the Baltimore metropolitan area’s regional water and wastewater systems,” **said Maryland Department of the Environment Acting Secretary Serena McIlwain**. “Our partnership will help ensure the protection of public health and the environment in the face of climate change, increase workforce opportunities, and reach communities that are overburdened and underserved.

“Providing clean and usable drinking water is an essential function of local government. Baltimore City and Baltimore County residents deserve that from their leaders, and that’s why I’m pleased that County Executive Olszewski and Baltimore City Mayor Scott have come together to create the Regional Water and Wastewater Task Force,” **said Senate President Bill Ferguson**. “This is the first step in the right direction toward ensuring the long-term safety and reliability of the Baltimore region’s water infrastructure. We need a regional approach to maximize our public assets, protect the Bay, and effectively serve the region’s residents.”

“The future of the Baltimore region’s aging public water infrastructure is an imperative for leaders across the state,” **said Maryland Speaker of the House Adrienne A. Jones**. “The agreement among our local and state legislative leaders marks the beginning of shared progress to modernize the region’s water utility and best serve all our constituents.”

Currently, residents of both Baltimore City and Baltimore County jurisdictions are served by water and wastewater systems managed by the Baltimore City Department of Public Works. Under an agreement that dates back to 1972, Baltimore City bills all customers for water use. According to the agreement that governs the shared sewer system, each jurisdiction bills its own residents for sewer charges and other related charges.

Today, the regional drinking water and wastewater systems, owned and operated primarily by Baltimore City, serve as many as 1.8 million residents across Baltimore City, Baltimore County and other surrounding jurisdictions. However, under existing State law, Baltimore City bears the sole responsibility for the water supply and wastewater operations, maintenance, and capital investments, while Baltimore County is the sole surrounding jurisdiction paying a proportionate share of these costs.

Due to regional population growth and the growing complexity of the utilities, in 2021, City and County officials [jointly-released a comprehensive review](#) of the shared water and wastewater systems’ existing operations, processes and procedures for Baltimore County and Baltimore City property owners.

The study identified opportunities for improving communications, data sharing, capital planning, and business processes between the jurisdictions and included the recommendation that Baltimore City and Baltimore County explore additional regional solutions, including potential alternative governance models, to help ensure the long-term quality, efficiency and equity of water and wastewater services, and improve customer experiences across the region.

The legislation announced today to create the Regional Water and Wastewater Task Force will be sponsored by representatives from both jurisdictions, including Baltimore City Delegation Chairs Senator Jill P. Carter and Delegate Stephanie Smith and Baltimore County Delegation Chairs Senator Charles Sydnor and Delegate Eric Ebersole.

“I am proud to help champion this much needed legislation to establish a Regional Water and Wastewater Task Force,” **said Senator Jill P. Carter**. “This will ensure that we are able to achieve a modern governance structure that effectively and equitably serves our residents.”

"It has been said that water is the essence of life and that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to all of our lives. After communities I serve were subjected to a five-day water boil advisory just months ago, I am honored to now stand with Mayor Scott, County Executive Olszewski, and other Baltimore area leaders to take this initial step to regionally address this pressing issue we all have a stake in solving," **said Senator Charles Sydnor**. "Safe drinking water and sanitation are non-negotiable for our communities and this legislation will ensure we recommend a better governance model that will lay the foundation to address these, and so many other issues for our children, and future generations not yet born."

"I support the legislation to create the Regional Water and Wastewater Task Force which will allow us to equitably distribute access to high-quality water and sewage services across our communities," **said Delegate Stephanie Smith**. "Our residents deserve efficiency, and this partnership shows that we recognize that."

"For decades Baltimore City has faced an undue burden having to serve as the center of services for our jurisdiction and beyond. In the 21st century, we must do our fair share to serve as partners on behalf of the entire shared metro area," **said Delegate Eric Ebersole**. "This process can be the beginning of a renewed partnership and shared responsibility for our water and sewer services. I commend the County Executive and the Mayor for recognizing this and for asking the state delegations to help them begin this cooperative effort."

Specifically, the Regional Water Governance Task Force would:

- Review the findings of the 2021 Comprehensive Business Process Review and other existing regional water and wastewater governance models;
- Assess alternative governance structures for the Baltimore Region's current water and wastewater utility;
- Analyze the fiscal implications and efficiencies of each alternative governance structure; and
- Recommend the governance model best suited for the Baltimore region's water and wastewater utility in order to improve management, operations, billing, capital planning, and rate stability for customers.

Under the proposed legislation, the Task Force would consist of 13 voting members, including:

- Five members appointed by the Mayor of Baltimore City;
- Three members appointed by the County Executive of Baltimore County;
- Two members appointed by the Governor of Maryland;
- One member of the State Senate appointed by the President of the Senate;
- One member of the House of Delegates appointed by the Speaker of the House; and
- One member appointed by the Chair of the Baltimore Metropolitan Council representing either Anne Arundel, Carrol, Howard or Harford Counties — jurisdictions served by the water or wastewater utility.

According to the proposed legislation, the Regional Water and Wastewater Task Force would submit their final recommendations to the Governor, Speaker of the House, President of the Senate, the Mayor of Baltimore City and the County Executive of Baltimore County by January 2024.

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