



1/27/2021

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve, Chair
Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: House Bill 204 – Environment and Natural Resources - Complaints, Inspections, and Enforcement - Information Maintenance and Reporting

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) has reviewed House Bill 204, entitled Environment and Natural Resources - Complaints, Inspections, and Enforcement - Information Maintenance and Reporting and would like to offer a letter of information about this legislation.

House Bill 204 would require MDE to: (1) receive and process complaints involving “suspected environmental violations”; (2) quarterly maintain a list of new complaints and monthly update new legal settlements proposed by MDE; and (3) develop, maintain, and update monthly a website listing certain complaints, inspections, enforcement actions, violations, and permits. The bill would also require DNR to annually report to the Governor and the General Assembly on information relating to the enforcement of natural resources and conservation laws.

The Department understands the need for more transparency regarding its data and is currently in the process of creating a web-access portal to make the required reports of the bill available to the public. In November 2020, the MDE finalized a switch to a new web-based database system called the Environmental Tracking System (ETS). ETS will make it much easier for the Department to create searchable databases for the public to use. However, not all programs at MDE currently use ETS. This will require considerable time and resources to develop reports that are required by this bill and make them available on the web-access portal. The Department is planning to develop the portal in phases in order to make data available as soon as the reports are approved.

The web-access portal will be a useful tool for the public and more than satisfy any of the reporting requirements in House Bill 204. Additionally, the portal will be continually developed and will also include actual documents of the data requested in the bill. For example, enforcement actions and inspection reports will be made available for download when searching through the portal. This will hopefully reduce Public Information Act (PIA) requests that the Department receives and free up resources to do other important tasks.

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Thank you for your consideration. We will continue to monitor House Bill 204 during the Committee's deliberations, and I am available to answer any questions you may have. Please feel free to contact me at 410-260-6301 or by e-mail at tyler.abbott@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tyler Abbott", written over a horizontal line.

Tyler Abbott