

February 24, 2022

Education Health and Environmental Affairs

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF SENATE BILL 479

My name is **Gene von Gunten**. I reside near Westminster, MD in Carroll County. I worked my entire professional life in local environmental health administration. I was employed by the Frederick County Health Department and the Montgomery County Department of Permitting Services (MCDPS) from 1978 until my retirement in 2017. My entire career was involved with individual water well and septic system matters. **I would like to testify in favor of Senate Bill 479.**

This Bill is, at its core, a **consumer protection** measure. It is intended to serve and protect the over 400,000 Maryland households that are served by on-site sewage disposal systems. These systems need an accurate soil evaluation; a competent design; an accomplished installer; and careful and educated septic service professionals.

For many **decades** we heaped much of this responsibility on our local health departments. We assumed there would be adequate and experienced staff at these local offices to handle these systems, cradle to grave. In the reality of 2022, this notion is **out of date** and the consumer is **not** being effectively served.

This Septic Board would fill in so many of the gaping holes that are now plaguing this industry. The consumers will benefit greatly from a Board with **oversight** over the entire on-site industry. Our well trained and honest providers will benefit from a level playing field and a single point of oversight; our septic system owners will be protected from bad actors and will have a **forum** to air complaints- short of an expensive and frustrating trip through the civil courts.

Once this Board takes over so many of these functions, MDE and the local health departments will be freed up to continue their **core responsibilities**. Their time will no longer be wasted acting as **referees** over complaints generated by shoddy workmanship.

This industry, MDE, and our local health departments are at a critical crossroads. If we fail to create this board, deepening staff shortages and accumulating conflicts will certainly be the result.

I hope you will support SB 479 and the entire on-site wastewater industry.

Gene von Gunten, BEHS #0318