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**VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL**

February 6, 2023

The Honorable Kumar Barve and  
Members of the House Environment and  
Transportation Committee  
House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street, Room 251  
Annapolis MD 21401

Re: **Letter of Information HB 216 – Environment – Salt Applicator Certification  
Program – Establishment**

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC Water) is the largest water and wastewater utility in Maryland, with nearly 5,844 miles of freshwater pipeline and over 5,610 miles of sewer pipeline. Our service area spans nearly 1,000 square miles in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, and we serve 1.9 million residents through approximately 475,000 customer accounts.

[HB 216](#) will require MDE to establish a "Salt Applicator Certification Program" to encourage efficient winter maintenance of roadways, parking lots, and sidewalks using salt or salt alternatives. By mandating a certification program, all commercial applicators would be trained to use salt and salt alternatives in the most efficient and appropriate manner, thereby reducing incidents of over salting and potential runoff into the WSSC Water system and impacting our water treatment and quality of the water delivered to our customers. Under this program, commercial applicators, those who use salt or salt alternatives or supervise those who use salt or salt alternatives to treat roads and parking lots during winter weather events, are required to be certified by October 1, 2025. MDE may adopt regulations to enforce and carry out provisions of the program.

When salt is used to treat roads, parking lots and sidewalks during winter events, it "runs off" into storm drains, local streams, and eventually into the Potomac and Patuxent rivers. This runoff has increased chloride levels in WSSC Water's source water over the past 30 years.

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The average yearly chloride levels in both the Potomac River and Patuxent River Reservoir have increased 300% during this period.

Because chloride cannot be removed during the filtration process, these increased levels impact our infrastructure by attacking and weakening metallic piping due to corrosion. This weakening of our system can lead to more water main leaks and breaks. Additionally, high levels of chloride can promote corrosion of lead pipes, give a salty taste to the drinking water, damage household appliances, boilers, and, if the water is being used for irrigation, it may inhibit the growth of vegetation.

High levels of salt also contribute to an increase in the presence of manganese, a non-harmful mineral by-product created by chloride's erosion of minerals in soil, which then enters the water system through snowmelt runoff.

In March 2015, salt levels in our source water reached a record high; at that time, there was an increase in snow events and the State Highway Administration reported an unusually high amount of salt use in treating roads, resulting in an increase in manganese in the Potomac River. This resulted in increased, long-term discolored water problems, with customers reporting over 5,300 discolored water complaints from March to October 2015. By comparison, WSSC Water has received an average of 2,200 discolored water complaints during those same months over the past 10 years.

Additional treatment measures have been put into place to remove the manganese at the plant; in addition, WSSC Water increased flushing of the water distribution system to address the discolored water. The cost of these treatment measures was over \$780,000 in 2015.

WSSC Water encourages the State to continue to take measures to reduce the amounts of chloride entering drinking water sources after winter weather events.

The Commissioners will take a formal vote on their position during their February meeting, at which time WSSC will submit our official position statement. Please feel free to contact me at (240) 564-5236 or [monica.marquina@wsscwater.com](mailto:monica.marquina@wsscwater.com) with any questions.

Sincerely,  
DocuSigned by:

*Monica Marquina*

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Monica C. Marquina  
Government Affairs Manager