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MAYOR

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SB 392

February 15, 2023

TO: Members of the Education, Energy & the Environment Committee and Members of the Budget & Taxation Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Interim Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 392 – Wastewater Facility Supplemental Operations & Maintenance Grant Program – Establishment

POSITION: LETTER OF SUPPORT

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe and Members of the Committees, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill 392.

Senate Bill 392 would establish a Wastewater Facility Supplemental Operations and Maintenance Grant Program that would provide competitive grants for publicly owned wastewater treatment plants (POTWs) facing operations and maintenance challenges that threaten the proper functioning of a facility's enhanced nutrient removal (ENR) technology; require the Maryland Water Infrastructure Financing Administration in the Department of the Environment (MDE) to administer the Program; and generally relating to the establishment of the Wastewater Facility Supplemental Operations and Maintenance Grant Program.

The City of Baltimore owns and operates two of the largest wastewater treatment plants in the State. The Back River Wastewater Treatment Plant is located in Essex, Maryland, has been in operation since 1911, and is rated to treat up to 180 million gallons/day (mgd) of wastewater. The Patapsco Wastewater Treatment Plant is located in the Curtis Bay area of Baltimore City, has been in operation since 1940, and is rated to treat up to 73 mgd of wastewater. Both of these POTWs are operating recently constructed ENR facilities. Baltimore's wastewater system provides regional service to more than 1.6 million customers. Anne Arundel, Baltimore, and Howard counties receive wastewater treatment services at these facilities under terms provided for in City/County agreements. In general, the counties that receive these wastewater services support the operating and capital costs based on their proportionate use of the underground collection infrastructure and the wastewater treatment facilities.

Over the past decade and more, both the Back River and Patapsco plants have undergone ever-increasing upgrades, and are now providing state-of-the-art ENR treatment. These added facilities have driven the need for more skilled maintenance personnel and operators, more power and chemicals usage, to maintain compliance with the plants' strict NPDES permit limits. The operations and maintenance costs for the Back River and Patapsco plants have increased over the past five full fiscal years, as shown below.

FY18	32,796,557.16
FY19	39,697,174.49
FY20	54,837,131.63
FY21	47,834,167.61
FY22	79,221,757.21

In addition, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic coincided with the retirement of some long-serving and experienced personnel, which in turn led to vacancies in key operating and maintenance positions. These positions have been difficult to fill, as many public and private facilities are experiencing similar staffing challenges, both regionally and nationally. It is also important to note that POTWs operate around the clock, providing no opportunity to pause or shut down operations due to staffing shortages. Currently, the Wastewater Facilities Division has 148 vacant positions, for a 25% vacancy rate.

The City has conducted multiple job fairs, established several programs to bring in young and under-employed people to learn about and enter the water and wastewater industry, and created internal training and apprenticeship opportunities to increase existing staff's skills to advance within the organization. These programs are showing great promise, but it will take time to stabilize the filling of these critical positions. As an interim measure, the City has engaged the services of several private contractors to supplement the current maintenance staff, totaling just under \$27 Million. In addition, the City has retained the services of a private firm to provide monitoring and recording of preventative and corrective maintenance and ongoing training modules to maintenance staff, at a cost of \$400,000. The proposed Wastewater Facility Supplemental Operations and Maintenance Grant Program embodied in Senate Bill 392 would provide much needed support to help offset some of these costs as the City works to stabilize its workforce.

It is for these reasons that the Baltimore City Administration supports Senate Bill 392.