



House Bill 923

Environment - Water and Sewer Service

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Environment and Transport Committee

Date: February 21, 2018

From: Barbara Zektick

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 923. This bill gives counties broader authority to develop water affordability programs and shut off water to vacant/abandoned properties.

Over the interim, MACo participated in the Task Force to Study Tax Sales in Maryland, along with representatives from Baltimore City, Dorchester and Prince George's Counties; the Maryland Municipal League; Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development; community development organizations; the Maryland Bar Association; and tax lien and tax sale participant associations.

Over the course of the Task Force's meetings, several representatives put forth novel ideas both on how to tweak the tax sale process to encourage blight remediation, and how to help homeowners avoid tax sale altogether. This bill is one of several pieces of legislation put forth to help homeowners avoid tax sale, and in addition, it helps communities with blight remediation.

This bill helps homeowners avoid going to tax sale over unpaid water bills by addressing the problem long before those bills become overdue. By enabling counties to develop water affordability programs, payment plans and "round up programs" to fund payment assistance services, HB 923 helps counties help those who can least afford their water bills, in a targeted manner that makes the most sense for each local jurisdiction.

In addition, enabling water shut off to vacant and abandoned properties helps keep water bills at bay at properties where the service is not being used or may even cause harm by flooding or otherwise deteriorating a vacant structure. By reducing or eliminating these unneeded services, bills and resulting liens remain lower on the property, and it is easier to bring the property to more fruitful use.

For the reasons stated above, MACo **SUPPORTS** HB 923 and urges the Committee to grant it a **FAVORABLE** report.