



MEMORANDUM

To: The Honorable President and Members of the City Council
c/o Shamoyia Gardiner, Deputy Chief of Staff, Council President's Office

From: KC Kelleher, Deputy Chief of Staff, Comptroller Henry

Date: June 9, 2026

Re: 26-0202 - Charter Amendment – Department of Water and Wastewater

Position: Favorable

FOR the purpose establishing a Department of Water and Wastewater among the Executive Departments; providing for the powers and duties of the Department of Water and Wastewater; transferring certain powers and duties from the Department of Public Works to the Department of Water and Wastewater; repealing certain obsolete provisions; conforming, correcting, and clarifying related provisions; and submitting this amendment to the qualified voters of the City for adoption or rejection.

The Office of the Comptroller supports this Charter Amendment establishing a Department of Water and Wastewater as a standalone City agency.

Baltimore Regional Water Governance Task Force

From 2023 to 2024, Comptroller Bill Henry served as Chair of the Baltimore Regional Water Governance Task Force, which was established pursuant to State law to evaluate and recommend the governance model best suited for the Baltimore region's water and wastewater systems. Following seven public meetings, extensive stakeholder engagement, and analysis conducted by an independent consultant, the Task Force recommended as its first phase of implementation the establishment of a standalone Department of Water and Wastewater.

The Task Force concluded that separating water and wastewater functions from the Department of Public Works would provide a singular organizational focus on the operation, maintenance, capital investment, and service delivery responsibilities of the regional utility system. The recommendation recognized that an independent department would streamline decision-making, improve accountability, elevate leadership positions

necessary to attract and retain qualified personnel, and better align organizational structure with the scale and complexity of the system.

This recommendation is also consistent with practices employed by peer regional water utilities across the country, including those serving New York City, Atlanta, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Miami-Dade County.

Baltimore Regional Water Governance Model Work Group

HB1509 established the **Baltimore Regional Water Governance Model Work Group (BRWGMWG)** to continue the work of the Task Force. As Chair of the Work Group, the Comptroller set up two committees to assist the Work Group in implementing its mission: Finance & Funding and Governance.

The Finance & Funding committee's goal is to support the Work Group in producing financial, funding, and customer-assistance recommendations for water, wastewater, and stormwater service across Baltimore City and Baltimore County. The Committee operates within the existing institutional framework established by the 1972 water and 1974 wastewater agreements and may recommend modifications or amendments to those agreements. The Committee's role is to clarify how the current system operates and recommend improvements that strengthen affordability, equity, transparency, and long-term financial sustainability.

The Governance committee's goal is to identify strategies that will improve how water, wastewater, and stormwater operations are managed within and between Baltimore City and Baltimore County.

As the Work Group continues its work, both committees will consider the proposed Charter Amendment to establish a Department of Water and Wastewater and incorporate its potential impacts into their recommendations.

Closing

The proposed separation of Water and Wastewater from other Public Works functions represents a strategic opportunity to modernize utility operations and serve the Baltimore area with more focus. The **BRWGMWG** will support the City and County on strategies to coordinate under this new framework. By aligning governance structures with the unique demands of water and wastewater services, the City will set the utility for long-term sustainability and success.

For these reasons, the Office of the Comptroller requests a favorable report on City Council Bill 26-0202.

CC:

Celeste Amato, Chief of Staff, Comptroller's Office