



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Dr. Michelle Taylor, Commissioner of Health, Baltimore City Health Department
CC	Mayor's Office of Government Relations
DATE	May 5, 2026
SUBJECT	26-0050R – Informational Hearing – Data Centers – Community Impact and Use Standards

Position: Without recommendation

BILL SYNOPSIS

Council Bill 26-0050R – Informational Hearing – Data Centers – Community Impact and Use Standards calls for an informational hearing involving several City agencies, including the Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD), to discuss the following: (1) the impact a data center may have on Baltimore City's infrastructure, environment, and its community as a whole; (2) best practices for data center zoning, use standards, and other development standards; and (3) which techniques and technologies are available to limit the public health and environmental impact of these increasingly common facilities.

SUMMARY OF POSITION

BCHD appreciates the opportunity to attend the hearing on Council Bill 26-0050R. The agency's position summary was developed using a social determinants of health perspective. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services organizes the social determinants of health into five domains: (1) economic stability, (2) education access and quality, (3) health care access and quality, (4) neighborhood and built environment, and (5) social and community context.ⁱ Data centers have implications on both domains 1 and 2.

Economic stability

Economic stability is a key social determinant of health in that it affects people's ability to afford healthy food, health care, and housing, all of which are essential to overall health.ⁱ Data centers may increase employment opportunities. For example, a data center slated to open in Pennsylvania in 2028 was estimated to create 3,400 jobs.ⁱⁱ However, research from the Brookings Institute found that jobs created are typically shorter-term construction jobs, with

ongoing operations work representing a relatively small proportion of jobs created by data centers.ⁱⁱⁱ

Neighborhood and built environment

The built environment includes, among other things, air and water quality.ⁱ An emerging body of research shows that data centers can have significant impacts on air quality and water usage, as well as produce noise that can cause disturbances for neighboring communities.^{iv,v} A recent study out of Virginia Commonwealth University found that data centers in Northern Virginia emitted significant carbon dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, and particulate matter.^{iv} Another study on the estimated public health impacts of fine particulate matter emissions from a data center in Loudoun County, Virginia found that if emissions remain at their current level (at the time of the study), “the facility’s permitted emissions are estimated to result in between \$53–99 million per year in health-related damages. These damages are driven primarily by an estimated 3.4 to 6.5 additional premature deaths per year across the impacted region, along with hospital admissions, asthma-related outcomes, and lost productivity.”^{vi} The study also found that the increases in particulate matter would be highest in census tracts that have higher proportions of Hispanic and Asian residents than the state average.^v This is notable, as previous studies have found that communities of color and historically under-resourced communities experience a disproportionate burden of exposure to airborne particulate matter and other pollutants.^{vii}

In Maryland, air and water quality fall under the purview of the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). BCHD has been in contact with MDE regarding their work related to data centers. A 2025 bill passed by the Maryland General Assembly ([SB116](#)) requires MDE – along with the Maryland Energy Administration and the University of Maryland School of Business – to conduct an analysis of the likely environmental, energy, and economic impacts of data center development in the State. The analysis is required to include the potential impacts on air and water quality and the availability of technologies that could mitigate the environmental impacts of data centers, and the feasibility of implementing these technologies in the State. Per MDE, the study is to be completed by the end of 2026, so there is not yet public information available on the findings.

Conclusion

The potential public health impacts of data centers are important to BCHD in that its mission is to protect health, eliminate disparities, and enhance the wellbeing of everyone in our community through education, coordination, advocacy, and direct service delivery. As such, the agency appreciates the opportunity to participate in an informational hearing on this topic.

ⁱ Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (2020). Social determinants of health. Healthy People 2030. <https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health>

ⁱⁱ Mandler, C. (2024). Three Mile Island nuclear plant will reopen to power Microsoft data centers. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2024/09/20/nx-s1-5120581/three-mile-island-nuclear-power-plant-microsoft-ai>

ⁱⁱⁱ Muro M, Shriya Methkuppally. (2026). Turning the data center boom into long-term, local prosperity. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/turning-the-data-center-boom-into-long-term-local-prosperity/>

^{iv} Pitt, D., Suen, E., and Plisko, E. (2026). "Localized Air Pollution Impacts from Data Centers in Northern

Virginia." VCU Institute for Sustainable Energy and Environment.

https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=isee_pubs/&ref=henricocitizen.com

^v Wittenberg, A. (2026). A data center opened next door. Then came the high-pitched whine. POLITICO.

<https://www.politico.com/news/2026/03/11/data-centers-ai-electricity-virginia-00815219>

^{vi} Cork, M. and Dominici, F. (2026). Air Quality, Health, and Economic Impacts of the Vantage Data Center Facility. Environmental Piedmont Council. <https://www.pecva.org/wp-content/uploads/Health-Impacts-Vantage-Data-Center-Report-2.pdf>

^{vii} Kerr, G. H., van Donkelaar, A., Martin, R. V., Brauer, M., Bukart, K., Wozniak, S., Goldberg, D. L., & Anenberg, S. C. (2024). Increasing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Ambient Air Pollution-Attributable Morbidity and Mortality in the United States. *Environmental health perspectives*, 132(3), 37002. <https://doi.org/10.1289/EHP11900>