



Legislation Text

File #: 21-0075, Version: 0

Explanation: Capitals indicate matter added to existing law.
[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

* **Warning:** This is an unofficial, introductory copy of the bill.
The official copy considered by the City Council is the first reader copy.

Introductory*

City of Baltimore Council Bill

Introduced by: Councilmember Burnett

A Bill Entitled

An Ordinance concerning

Study and Report - Sewage Backup Expedited Reimbursement and Direct Assistance Program

For the purpose of requiring that the Baltimore City Department of Public Works submit a report to the Mayor and City Council studying the feasibility of implementing an expedited reimbursement and direct assistance program for any sewage backup, not limited to wet-weather, capacity-related causes; requiring certain agency assistance; and providing for a special effective date.

Recitals

In 2002, Baltimore City entered into a Consent Decree with the Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) and the Maryland Department of the Environment (“MDE”) to address violations of the federal Clean Water Act from discharges of untreated sewage from Baltimore’s collection system into the Back River, Patapsco River, the Chesapeake Bay, and other waters of the United States.

Under the 2002 Consent Decree, Baltimore’s Department of Public Works (“DPW”) was required to conduct a thorough investigation of its wastewater collection system and undertake certain systematic and operational improvements to eliminate sanitary sewer overflows and otherwise achieve compliance with the Clean Water Act and analogous State law.

In 2017, the City entered into a Modified Consent Decree with the EPA and MDE that set forth new requirements and deadlines for the City to achieve compliance into two phases. The deadline for completion of Phase I was January 2, 2021, and Phase II is to be completed by December 31, 2030.

Pursuant to the Modified Consent Decree, DPW is required to establish a “Building Backup Expedited Reimbursement Program” (the “Program”) to reimburse City homeowners, renters, non-commercial occupants, and residents for the costs of cleaning up and disinfecting after certain building sewage backups that are the result of surcharging in the collection system caused by *wet* weather events.

The Program has been in a three-year pilot stage between April 2018 and April 2021. This year, the City, MDE, and EPA must agree on a permanent version of the program that will remain in effect for the rest of the

term of the Modified Consent Decree.

On March 23, 2021, DPW launched a new pilot program, entitled the “Sewage Onsite Support (SOS) Cleanup Program. This program aims to provide “professional cleaning, disinfection, and disposal services from a third-party vendor at no cost to Baltimore City residents impacted by capacity-related sewage backup damage caused by a heavy wet weather (rain/snowmelt) event.”

To date, no provision has been made for reimbursement or cleaning services for sewage backups during dry weather events or attributable to non-capacity related events.

Section 1. Be it ordained by the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore, That:

- (a) No later than 60 days from the enactment of this Ordinance, the Baltimore City Department of Public Works shall submit a report to the Mayor and City Council setting forth a comprehensive feasibility study, as fully described in this Ordinance, regarding sewage backups.
- (b) The report required by subsection (a) of this section shall set forth a study into the feasibility of implementing a modified Expedited Reimbursement Program (“ERP”) to reimburse City homeowners, renters, non-commercial occupants, and residents for the costs of cleaning and disinfecting after building sewage backups that are the result both wet and dry weather events, including:
 - (1) an evaluation of the cost per backup of such a modified ERP based on the current ERP and any materials reviewed relating to cost prior to the current ERP went into effect; and
 - (2) a detailed analysis of any obstacles that the Department of Public Works believes would impede the expansion of the ERP and an explanation of any inquiries or efforts that the Department has made to overcome these obstacles.
- (c) The report required by subsection (a) of this section shall set forth a study into the feasibility of implementing a modified SOS Cleanup Program that would provide professional cleaning, disinfection, and disposal services from a third-party vendor at no cost to Baltimore City residents impacted after sewage backups that are caused by both wet and dry weather events, including:
 - (1) an evaluation of the cost per backup of such a modified SOS Cleanup Program based on the current SOS Cleanup Program and any materials reviewed to cost before the current SOS Cleanup Program went into effect; and
 - (2) a detailed analysis of any obstacles that the Department of Public Works believes would impede the expansion of the SOS Cleanup Program and an explanation of any inquiries or efforts that the Department has made to overcome these obstacles.
- (d)
 - (1) The report required by subsection (a) of this section shall include a cost analysis utilizing empirical data and generally accepted principles in cost projections.
 - (2) The cost analysis required by this subsection shall be disaggregated by:
 - (i) wet weather backups caused by conditions within the public system;
 - (ii) dry weather backups caused by conditions within the public system;
 - (iii) wet weather backups caused by conditions within the private system; and

- (iv) dry weather backups caused by conditions within the private system.
- (e) The report required by subsection (a) of this section shall include an evaluation of the funds that the City has expended over the past 10 years in litigation costs related to sewage backups, including, as the case may be, settlement amounts, damages awarded, and attorney time.
- (f) The Law Department, Baltimore City Information Technology, the Baltimore City Health Department, and the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management shall assist the Department of Public Works in the preparation of the report required by subsection (a) of this section.

Section 2. And be it further ordained, That this Ordinance takes effect on the date it is enacted.