



For Immediate Release: Jun 13, 2022

Contact

Alice Volpitta, Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper, Blue Water Baltimore
(410) 236-9136
avolpitta@bluewaterbaltimore.org

Angela Haren, Senior Attorney, Chesapeake Legal Alliance
(415) 310-3550
angela@chesapeakelegal.org

Blue Water Baltimore Seeks Immediate Injunctive Relief at Maryland’s Largest Wastewater Treatment Plants

Baltimore, MD—Blue Water Baltimore, represented by attorneys at the Chesapeake Legal Alliance and Barley Snyder, filed a motion for a preliminary injunction in the U.S. District Court, District of Maryland to require Baltimore City to act immediately to fix ongoing health and safety issues at its Patapsco and Back River wastewater treatment plants and to post health advisory signs at water recreation areas impacted by the plants. Recent inspections at both facilities found continuing and, in some cases, worsening deficiencies and disrepair, causing dangerous conditions for nearby residents and plant workers, as well as consistent violations of the plants’ discharge permits, despite active orders from the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to rectify these violations.

“While long-term solutions are needed, there are immediate steps that must be taken quickly to stop the onslaught of pollution that continues to flow into our rivers,” says Alice Volpitta, Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper with Blue Water Baltimore. “The problems at Back River have been extensively documented, and we’re now absolutely in a crisis. Every day that this continues is a step backwards for our communities’ health and for Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts.”

The request for preliminary injunctive relief is the next step in Blue Water Baltimore’s ongoing federal Clean Water Act case against the City that was filed on behalf of its members in December 2021.

“Time and time again the City has failed to act. The illegal discharges are putting public and environmental health in danger. We’re asking the Court to address this emergency situation,” says Angela Haren, Senior Attorney with Chesapeake Legal Alliance.

2631 Sisson Street • Baltimore, MD 21211 • 410.254.1577 • www.bluewaterbaltimore.org





This motion comes on the heels of a state-mandated report about conditions at the Back River plant, including a top-down analysis of ongoing challenges and what actions need to be prioritized to bring the plant back into compliance. According to the Maryland Environmental Service (MES), “the violations occurring at the Back River WWTP have evolved into a situation where this is now equivalent to an extreme event, and these issues need to be addressed on an emergency basis.” MES also cited a lack of cooperation from the Baltimore Department of Public Works, writing, “The lack of responsiveness in addressing critical issues that need to be addressed to get the plant back in compliance keeps frustration high and is having an impact throughout the facility.”

A May inspection of the Patapsco plant by the Maryland Department of the Environment found problems at almost every stage of processing, with equipment inoperable, clogged, overwhelmed, or simply bypassed, leading to consistent and ongoing violations of discharge permits.

Blue Water Baltimore is seeking an injunction to compel the City to acknowledge and act on this emergency situation for what it is. We are asking the court to require plant operators to immediately make the necessary repairs to prevent discharge of sludge and solids into the Patapsco and Back rivers; fully staff both plants with qualified workers; mitigate fats, oils, and grease discharges at the Patapsco plant; adequately sample and monitor the discharge from both plants; and install signs in the affected waterways notifying the public of the health risks arising from the plant effluent.

“We must all work together as partners to implement the solutions that have been outlined in MDE’s inspection reports and those that have come to light in MES’ newest report,” says Tony Bridges, Executive Director of Blue Water Baltimore. “The seriousness of the situation is well documented. What we’re asking for is accountability to fast-track the critical work that’s needed, because we can’t keep our communities or environment waiting any longer than they already have.”

Blue Water Baltimore, home of the Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper, is a local 501(c)(3) nonprofit watershed organization with a mission to restore the quality of Baltimore’s rivers, streams, and Harbor to foster a healthy environment, a strong economy, and thriving communities.

Chesapeake Legal Alliance is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to providing free legal services, with a mission to apply the power of the law to protect and restore clean water and promote healthy, resilient ecosystems for communities across the Chesapeake Bay watershed.