



# Maryland

## Department of the Environment

Larry Hogan, Governor  
Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor

Ben Crumbles, Secretary  
Horacio Tablada, Deputy Secretary

October 14, 2021

### **CERTIFIED MAIL**

The Honorable Brandon M. Scott  
Office of the Mayor  
250 City Hall, 100 N. Holliday Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

RE: Patapsco Wastewater Treatment Plant, AI# 3076 and  
Back River Wastewater Treatment Plant, AI# 8449

Dear Mayor Scott:

Given Maryland Department of the Environment's (MDE) mission of protecting environmental health, restoring the Chesapeake Bay, and being good stewards of state and federal clean water funding, I strongly encourage you to direct significant funding Baltimore City is receiving under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to fix the recently discovered problems at the Back River and Patapsco River wastewater treatment plants (WWTP).

MDE is extremely concerned that effluent violations for nutrients and solids continue to directly and negatively impact the health of Patapsco River and Chesapeake Bay. Through Maryland taxpayers' contributions to the Bay Restoration Fund and the state Biological Nutrient Removal grants, a total of \$215.2 million was invested toward upgrades to the Patapsco WWTP to Enhanced Nutrient Removal (ENR) and a total of \$437.5 million was invested to upgrade Back River to ENR. In addition, \$203.1 million were provided in the State Revolving Fund and \$127 million from Baltimore City's local funds for total investments of \$982.8 million in infrastructure upgrades, and neither of these plants are currently operating at ENR levels. Unfortunately, a lack of maintenance, effective management and adequate staffing have had significant impacts toward achieving ENR levels. Using the reported monitoring data the combined nitrogen pollution from Patapsco and Back River increased by 68% in FY21 when compared to FY20 levels.

MDE recognizes the recent focus of the city to develop and begin implementing strategic plans that are expected to bring the Patapsco and Back River WWTPs back into compliance. To this end, dedicated funding is necessary to ensure that effective operation and maintenance issues are resolved.

MDE recommends that the City of Baltimore Department of Public Works use ARPA funds for infrastructure repairs and maintenance of the Patapsco and Back River WWTPs.

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The city is estimated to receive more than \$641 million in ARPA funding, which is eligible for investment in wastewater infrastructure. The citizens of Maryland need to be reassured that Baltimore City is committed to cleaning up the Bay. Funding emergency projects that provide immediate improvements to the operation of these plants will demonstrate the city's focus and intent toward achieving water quality improvements.

Sincerely,

Ben Grumbles

Secretary

cc: Johnny Olszewski, Jr., County Executive, Baltimore County  
Jason Mitchell, Director, Baltimore City Department of Public Works  
David R. Brinkley, Secretary, Maryland Department of Budget and Management