

SUPPORT SB1396

Onsite Sewage Indemnification Fund; use of Fund for grants to certain property owners.

Senator Ghazala F. Hashmi

Reasons to support SB1396:

Many households throughout the Commonwealth use on-site wastewater disposal, or septic systems, to safely treat sewage. When properly installed, maintained, and within their lifespan, these systems protect public health and the environment. But when septic systems fail, raw sewage can back up into homes, bubble up in yards, or seep into our groundwater, on its way to our rivers and streams.

Estimates suggest that there are more than 500,000 households across Virginia with septic systems that are over 40 years old. Many were designed to meet antiquated health and environmental safety regulations and are now threatened by changing environmental conditions like sea level rise. These aging systems may be failing to hold and treat raw sewage, sending pathogens and nutrient pollution into our communities and waterways. Since the Chesapeake Bay Cleanup effort began in 2010, nitrogen pollution from septic systems has grown and must be addressed to meet our Bay commitments.

Here at home and across the country, the impacts of inadequate sewage disposal disproportionately affect communities of color that have been historically excluded from municipal wastewater infrastructure. Virginia's small, rural communities lack the resources for new infrastructure or the maintenance and repair of aging facilities. And Virginia's coastal communities are already experiencing septic system failures from climate change.

Overview:

SB1396 establishes that it is the policy of the Commonwealth to prioritize universal access to wastewater treatment that protects public health and the environment, and supports local economic growth. Additionally, the bill:

- Permits VDH to use the Onsite Sewage Indemnification Fund for loans and grants to low-income property owners for the repair or improvement of septic systems;
- Authorizes VDH to consider the impacts of climate change and increased flooding from sea level rise when regulating the design and permitting of septic systems;
- Establishes an interagency Wastewater Infrastructure Policy Working Group; and
- Directs DEQ and VDH to conduct a wastewater infrastructure needs assessment every four years.



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This position was taken by Virginia Conservation Network (VCN)'s Legislative Committee and Board of Directors and is supported by Virginia's conservation community. For a complete list of VCN positions, visit www.vcnva.org/bill-tracker. VCN is committed to building a powerful, diverse, and highly-coordinated conservation movement focused on protecting our Commonwealth's natural resources today and for tomorrow.