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Blue Water Baltimore Files Lawsuit Against Baltimore City Over Wastewater Treatment Violations

Baltimore, MD – Blue Water Baltimore (BWB), home of the Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper, filed a complaint in the United States District Court for the District of Maryland on Wednesday against Baltimore City for excessive pollution and ongoing violations of the Clean Water Act at the Patapsco and Back River Wastewater Treatment Plants (WWTPs). BWB is represented by Chesapeake Legal Alliance (CLA) and Barley Snyder, LLP.

Records show that both of the WWTPs have been discharging pollutants far beyond allowable limits including numerous exceedances for bacteria and nutrients. Excessive amounts of bacteria can carry pathogens that make people sick and high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus can cause algae blooms which can lead to fish kills and dead zones. As the two largest WWTPs in Maryland, these violations threaten the state’s ability to reach its goals under the Chesapeake Bay cleanup agreement. This action comes at the end of the 60-day notice period required by the Clean Water Act, following notice in October that BWB intended to file suit.

BWB and CLA have been working with Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) and Baltimore City since the violations were discovered. The City has begun to address some of the problems at both of the plants.

“We are using every avenue available, including the Clean Water Act, to ensure that there is a comprehensive plan with measurable deadlines to address all violations, repair the damage to water quality, and enhance oversight to ensure that our waterways and our communities are protected in the future,” said Alice Volpitta, Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper at Blue Water Baltimore.

“The City’s failure to operate the wastewater treatment plants in accordance with the law puts public health at risk, degrades ecosystems, and hinders the public’s ability to enjoy and recreate in local waterways,” said Angela Haren, Senior Attorney for Chesapeake Legal Alliance. “Our clients have filed a complaint to ensure these illegal discharges are corrected immediately.”

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Blue Water Baltimore looks forward to working with MDE and Baltimore City to ensure the plants are returned to full compliance as quickly as possible. BWB will continue to amplify the voices of the residents of the greater Baltimore region, the people who are harmed physically and economically by these violations.

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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 that applies the power of the law to protect and restore clean water and promote healthy, resilient ecosystems for communities across the Chesapeake Bay watershed.