What we can do about Maryland's aging and underfunded water infrastructure

By Laura Runkle

The Back River Wastewater Treatment Plant in Dundalk. **STAFF FILE**

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) recently released the 2025 Maryland Infrastructure Report Card, an assessment of 13 key infrastructure categories across the state.

The grades show that Maryland is still grappling with the challenges of aging, underfunded water and wastewater (i.e., sewer) systems. Drinking water infrastructure received a grade of C, while wastewater infrastructure earned a C+. These grades mark only a slight improvement in the four years since the last ASCE Infrastructure Report Card was issued.

The poor marks and slow progress speak to the urgent need for committed investment, repair and modernization of the state's water infrastructure. This must be a collaborative process where public and private stakeholders — legislators, regulators and utilities — come together to develop solutions that keep Maryland's infrastructure strong and support the economy.

Sustained investment is critical to success. According to the EPA's 2023 Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment, Maryland will require $14.6 billion to address drinking water infrastructure needs over the next 20 years. That doesn't even account for wastewater needs.

American Water recently announced plans to invest between $46-$48 billion in its systems nationwide from 2026 to 2035. Here in Maryland, the company is already taking a proactive approach. In 2024 and 2025, Maryland American Water invested millions across the state, installing, replacing or repairing water mains and service lines and making improvements to the Winters Run Water Treatment Plant so it can continue to provide high-quality drinking water to the Town of Bel Air.

Investing in Maryland's water systems also means investing in the people who run them — an imperative as much of the water workforce moves closer to retirement. According to Black & Veatch's 2023 Water Report, the aging water workforce and the difficulty of hiring qualified employees were cited as the second most challenging concern among 450 water sector stakeholders. This marks a huge opportunity for Maryland, which has lost 15,100 federal jobs since last January due to reductions in the federal workforce.

Maryland must invest in a workforce that is skilled in infrastructure and water technology and trained in climate resilience, digital systems and advanced treatment. Utilities, labor, local government and communities can work together to identify, attract and recruit talented applicants. We must use every tool we have to show the next generation that the water sector is innovative, technology-forward and vital to the future.

Safe, clean, reliable and affordable water is critical to Maryland's economy. In fact, according to the Value of Water Campaign, for every $1 million invested in water infrastructure, upwards of 10 jobs are generated throughout local economies. By strengthening infrastructure, we not only guard against costly emergency repairs, we invest in reliability, so Marylanders can continue to depend on water and wastewater systems for critical needs such as drinking, sanitation, agriculture and fire protection. Maryland deserves no less.

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