



WATERKEEPERS CHESAPEAKE

2022 WATERKEEPER OUTSTANDING WIN (WOW) AWARD

ALICE VOLPITTA, BALTIMORE HARBOR WATERKEEPER

Waterkeepers Chesapeake's **2022 Waterkeeper Outstanding Win (WOW) Award** is awarded to [Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper Alice Volpitta](#). Volpitta is an exemplary ambassador for clean water, public health, and grassroots advocacy in Baltimore and the Patapsco River watershed. She became Waterkeeper in 2020 after serving six years as Blue Water Baltimore's lead water quality scientist. Volpitta has been successful in galvanizing water quality scientists, state agencies, area residents, and local groups such as the Back River Restoration Committee to participate in the hands-on work of water sampling. These efforts inform and engage the public, giving them an empowered voice in their fight for and right to clean water.

Among Volpitta's most impactful work is tackling pollution and violations of the Clean Water Act at the Patapsco and Back River Wastewater Treatment plants. She has implemented water quality monitoring tools to detect pollution at 49 locations across Baltimore City and Baltimore and Anne Arundel counties. In late 2021, she discovered and reported that deteriorating conditions and violations at the Patapsco plant jeopardized public health, workers' safety, ecosystem health, and the public's ability to enjoy and recreate in local waterways. The data collected and shared with the Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) compelled the agency to investigate the Back River plant where they found gross violations as well. MDE began its own routine monitoring, resulting in health advisories warning the public to avoid water contact in the Back River, and a state takeover of the plant. In December 2021, Blue Water Baltimore (BWB) filed a lawsuit for excessive pollution and ongoing violations of the Clean Water Act at the Patapsco and Back River Wastewater Treatment Plants.

Ever since Baltimore City began closing off antiquated combined sewer overflow points to comply with the 2002 Consent Decree with EPA, the problem of sewage backups into

individual homes has gotten worse for residents. A few years ago, in response to community outrage, the city established programs to support residents experiencing sewage backups. This fall, Volpitta rallied residents, partners and allies on the City Council to expand the city's two support programs. Backups are increasing in frequency and intensity due to climate change and crumbling infrastructure, and are a public health crisis. Expansion of these programs would address backups regardless of weather conditions, providing cleanup support, reimbursement, and protection of personal property. Volpitta continues to work with community advocates like Natasza Bock-Singleton (Waterkeepers Chesapeake 2021 Water Warrior Award winner) to hold accountable state and city agencies charged with protecting public health.

In December 2021, Blue Water Baltimore, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and two city residents brought a petition to the Circuit Court for Baltimore City to strengthen the municipal stormwater permit issued by the State of Maryland. Though the petition was denied, BWB is appealing and continues to push for stricter limits on pollutants discharged into Baltimore's waterways through storm sewers and advocates for improved stormwater management systems. The permit fails to take into account the most recent forecasts of the effects of climate change, which will only worsen urban flooding that endangers the health and property of city residents.

The water quality monitoring program that Volpitta established at BWB has achieved Tier III status, the highest, as recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Chesapeake Bay Program. Data from its 49 stations in the Baltimore region are publicly available at www.howstthewaterhon.org.

The hands-on water quality work Alice Volpitta conducts in the Baltimore region and Patapsco River Watershed, her outreach to and rallying of the local community, and her informed and powerful voice for clean water and community health earns her Waterkeepers Chesapeake's 2022 Waterkeeper Outstanding Win Award.

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Find information about *In Defense of Water* here:

<https://waterkeeperschesapeake.org/indefenseofwater2022/>