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JOINT MEDIA RELEASE:

St. Mary's County Metropolitan Commission

St. Mary's County Health Department

St. Mary's College of Maryland

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St. Mary's Collaboration to Study COVID-19 in Wastewater

CALIFORNIA, MD (May 29, 2020) – The St. Mary's County Metropolitan Commission (MetCom), the St. Mary's County Health Department (SMCHD), and St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM), have partnered on a pilot project to monitor the presence of COVID-19 in local wastewater. Detecting novel coronavirus in local wastewater before outbreaks of coronavirus disease happen allows for early public health intervention to suppress disease and readying of health care resources.

"We need to think about the long-term with COVID-19. We may be dealing with this virus for years," said Dr. Meena Brewster, St. Mary's County Health Officer. "This pilot study on virus in wastewater helps us plan for longer-term monitoring. In the future, when this pandemic is over, we may have to play whack-a-rona with this virus - pick up on early signs of it re-emerging and aggressively implement public health measures to suppress it before it becomes an epidemic."

"The Metropolitan Commission is excited about the opportunity to help quantify the scale of this virus and potentially determine if there is a population link to a specific wastewater treatment plant," said George Erichsen, MetCom Executive Director. "MetCom facilities process wastewater produced by local residences and businesses so we have a perfect opportunity to work with the College and to provide the Health Officer with background data that could be used in science-based recovery recommendations."

"St. Mary's College is happy to lend its expertise to this important local initiative that may prove beneficial for the citizens of the state beyond the county," said Dr. Tuajuanda Jordan, St. Mary's College President. "This collaborative partnership between St. Mary's College, the St. Mary's County Health Department and MetCom is supported by our local COVID-19 Scientific Advisory Group and is the first of its kind in Maryland."

MetCom is providing wastewater samples from all county wastewater treatment plants to SMCM, and SMCHD is supporting laboratory supplies for SMCM so faculty from the biology department can process the wastewater samples in their laboratories. As expected, early results of this pilot study confirm the presence of SARS-CoV-2 in local wastewater. Based on results from the pilot study, SMCHD epidemiologists and faculty from the SMCM biology and mathematics departments will work together to develop a longer-term sampling protocol in order to monitor for the presence of SARS-CoV-2 in the community and inform public health decision making.

For more information about COVID-19, please visit <http://www.smchd.org/coronavirus/>. Community members may call the COVID-19 Community Hotline at 301-475-4911 Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. for COVID-19 information.

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