

Public Health Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6977

AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH'S

Title: RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING DRINKING WATER.

Vote Date: 3/12/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/26/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Public Health Committee.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill requires the commissioner of the Department of Public Health (DPH) to adopt regulations to establish and define discharge categories for on-site sewage disposal systems under the department's jurisdiction. The regulations would also include alternative on-site sewage treatment systems and household and small commercial subsurface sewage disposal systems. In addition, the bill authorizes the commissioner to implement policies and procedures, while adopting these regulations, as well as issue and update technical standards for the design, installation, engineering, and operation of these systems.

The bill codifies current practice regarding the review and approval of new public water sources and requires DPH to adopt regulations setting requirements for:

- An application and approval process;
- The public water source location and construction;
- Water quality testing, monitoring, and treatment;
- As well as related inspections and investigation.

The bill also clarifies that bulk water haulers must renew their licenses every two years in the anniversary month of their initial license.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Manisha Juthani, Commissioner, the Department of Public Health (DPH):

DPH supports this bill and has begun the process of updating, improving, and modernizing our drinking water regulations. Our goal is to meet the July 1st deadline for the transfer of

subsurface sewage disposal systems with a capacity between 7,500 and 10,000 gallons from the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to DPH. The Department has identified the necessary statutory changes to provide clarity as we improve the regulations and facilitate the transfer of responsibilities between the two agencies. It is important that these standards be updated to guarantee the safety of these systems. Sections 2 and 3 of this bill provide the policy and procedure authority to implement this transfer. Regarding section 4 of the bill, it incorporates into statute the current process for the approval of new public water sources including approval of construction and location of the public water source and testing the quality and quantity of the water available.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Dr. Mitra Marvasti-Sitterly University of Connecticut, Pediatric Dental:

Fluoride in water is safe and effective. It has proven to prevent cavities in all ages. It is cost effective for both families and communities working throughout the day to help build strong teeth from the start. She urges that the committee require water companies serving a population of 20,000 or more to maintain an average monthly fluoride content of 0.7ppm.

Elizabeth Garra, Executive Director, CT Water Works Association (CWWA):

CWWA's members are committed to providing safe, high quality drinking water to meet the public health and safety needs of our customers. Ms. Garra addressed the issue of cross-connection which is "any actual or potential physical connection between a public water system and any source of non-potable liquid, solid or gas that could contaminate the potable water by backflow". For many years, The Cross Connections Committee of the CT Section of the American Water Works Association (CTAWWA) has worked with the DPH Drinking water Section (DWS) to ensure that the state's Cross Connection Manual and corresponding regulations protect against cross connections that may contaminate drinking water. Recently, DWS and the CTAWWA Cross Connections Committee have been discussing compliance issues that may necessitate a change in regulations or in the manual. CWWA is requesting the inclusion of language into either HB 6977 or 6978 to permit DPH to proceed with the implementation of policies and procedures necessary to address these issues.

Thomas Barger, National Director, CTAWWA:

Mr. Berger submitted testimony echoing the comments of Ms. Garra.

Frank DeFelice, Chairman, Regional Planning Commission, Planning and Zoning Commission and Inland Wetlands for the Town of Durham, CT:

Mr. DeFelice is requesting a revision to line 96 of the bill changing the word "and" to "or" correcting the intent.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Alicea Charamut, Executive Director, Rivers Alliance of CT:

The Alliance has significant concerns about sections 2 and 3 of the bill. Proper regulation and oversight of subsurface sewage systems is essential to preventing nutrient pollution to the surface and groundwater. These systems have the potential to contribute to the pollution of both public and private drinking water wells. It is also unclear what providing "policy and procedure authority" means. DPH's policy and procedure authority lies in providing standards and regulations. If DPH thinks this process will take longer than the deadline in statute, then the agency should ask for more time. This "policy and procedure authority" will only make it more difficult for local health directors who are responsible for implementing a broad range of programs. For this reason, the Alliance ask that the committee strike sections 2 and 3 and continue the conversation with DPH and stakeholders to provide local health directors with the standards, regulations, and direction they need to implement these programs.

Shannon Turner, Resident of East Hampton CT:

Ms. Turner believes that we do not have adequate studies to really know if fluoride is safe and asks the committee to consider this fact. Fluoride can cause several health issues that need to be considered before forcing public citizens to drink the water without consent. Fluoride has risks, and when there are risks, there must be an option to abstain.

Reported by: Kathleen Panazza

Date: March 14, 2025