

# Public Health Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No:** HB-5519 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH'S  
RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING ON-SITE WASTEWATER SPECIALISTS  
**Title:** AND WATER OPERATOR APPRENTICES.

**Vote Date:** 3/23/2026

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/13/2026

**File No.:** 544

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Public Health Committee.

### REASONS FOR BILL:

Municipal wastewater can contain human and other organic waste, nutrients, pathogens, microorganisms, suspended solids and household and industrial chemicals. If not treated and maintained properly, wastewater can pollute our water sources and pose a threat to human health and the environment. On-site wastewater specialists play a vital role in the state's public health infrastructure by inspecting and performing similar work related to subsurface sewage disposal systems. In Connecticut, there is no statutory requirement for certification or continued training beyond the Department of Public Health's (DPH's) trainings. Starting October 1, 2026, this bill would require anyone performing the duties of an on-site wastewater specialist to participate in a three-phase certification program. This program would ensure that wastewater specialists received proper training and certification prior to performing inspections and similar work related to septic systems. Participants would then become certified by the Department of a Public Health (DPH) and appointed by a local health director as the local health department's employee or contractor. Additionally, this bill provides a one-year grace period for current wastewater specialists to become certified and appointed. This bill also allows DPH to certify apprentice operators for water distribution systems, small water systems, and water treatment plants. These apprenticeship programs must be approved by the Department of Labor (DOL) for applicants to qualify and developed through collaboration among DPH, DOL, and a nonprofit dedicated to improving drinking water and supply.

### SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

The substitute language (1) adds the requirement that the Department of Public Health (DPH), along with the Department of Labor (DOL) and a nonprofit, develop an apprenticeship program and (2) makes minor and technical changes.

**RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

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

Dr. Juthani stated the proposed certification program includes the required education, scope of duties, and trainings and corresponding examinations developed by DPH. DPH currently trains individuals to review plans for subsurface sewage disposal systems as agents of local directors of health. However, there is no statutory requirement for certification or continued training. In Connecticut and across the country, there is a shortage of certified water operators. To combat this workforce shortage, this legislation enables certified water operators to supervise water operator apprentices in apprenticeships registered through the Department of Labor.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Elizabeth Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Wastewater Association (CWWA):**

Ms. Gara wrote that under current law, every water distribution plant, water treatment plant, and small water system must have at least one certified operator on-site. Due to workforce shortages, companies are finding it difficult to meet this statutory requirement. CWWA supports the intent of this bill to allow individuals to be certified as a water system operator upon completion of an approved apprenticeship. Although there isn't an apprenticeship program available, CWWA is open to working with DPH and DOL to establish one. Ms. Gara expressed concern that barriers exist when water system operators must obtain relevant certification. Many applicants fail their water operator exam on the first try and are required to resubmit their qualifications, and approval can take months. To address this concern, CWWA supports legislation to eliminate the requirement that individuals apply for requalification each time they retake the exam, similar to Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's process for certified wastewater operators.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None expressed.

**Reported by: Abbygail Shaw**

**Date: March 25, 2026**