

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

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House Bill 5470 - An Act Concerning A Drinking Water Quality Management Plan for the Preservation of Groton's Drinking Water and the Thames River Regional Pipeline

The Department of Public Health supports House Bill 5470

The DPH supports the development a drinking water quality management plan (DWQMP) due to the rising development pressures and potential degradation of drinking water quality. The DPH believes that a locally based comprehensive planning mechanism is necessary to provide adequate drinking water source protection to our state's public source water areas. EPA supports this initiative as an alternative to strict Federal Safe Drinking Water Act regulations and has provided a small grant to DPH to initiate the DWQMP planning process for Groton Utilities' supply source for the Thames River Regional Pipeline. Unprecedented growth and development has and will continue to encroach upon the state's public water supply drainage areas. State source protection policy that has stood for the last thirty years is challenged by increasing demand for lands and may no longer be able to provide water quality and public health protection. The DWQMP is a tool for long-term public health protection and sustainability of the state's public drinking water supplies that provides a public voice for each individual watershed community. To date, no locally based, comprehensive, stakeholder involved, implementation planning tool exists with the intent of protecting the state's drinking water quality.

This Bill is specific to supporting the Thames River Regional Pipeline. Groton Utilities reservoir system provides drinking water to the communities of Groton and Ledyard, and will in the future through the Thames River Regional Pipeline provide drinking water to Montville, with a potential back-up supply to Waterford, New London, and Norwich. Protecting the water quality of this regional source of potable water is critical to sustaining economic growth of the southeast region. The drainage area for Groton's reservoir system includes the portions of the towns of Groton, Ledyard, and Preston. The Drinking Water Quality Management Plan is a proactive grass roots effort, developed through a partnership with participating watershed towns, the public water system, and all stakeholders representing business, development, agriculture and environmental protection interests. The plan once developed will balance the needs of the watershed communities for economic growth while making provisions for long-term public health protection.

Public drinking water is a consumable product that can directly affect public health if source water quality is compromised. Drinking water that is contaminated at the source, not adequately treated, can endanger and increase the overall risks to public health. Reliance on treatment technology alone to remove contaminants of concern has increasing technical and financial limitations. Emerging contaminants whose occurrence, public health effects, and susceptibility to treatment are not fully known pose an increasing challenge to public health risk reduction and drinking water protection. Protection starting at the source is a vital component of the new national EPA Source Water Collaborative strategy. This protection serves as the initial barrier to contaminants entering drinking water supplies, increasing the efficiency and cost effectiveness of available treatment, while maintaining the relatively low cost of public water to the consumer. Source water that is compromised by contaminants and not protected, requires expensive water treatment systems that will raise consumer cost.

Thank you for your consideration of the Department's views on this bill.