



198 Park Road, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
West Hartford, CT 06119  
(860) 231-8842  
[www.EnvironmentConnecticut.org](http://www.EnvironmentConnecticut.org)

Written Testimony of Christopher Phelps, Program Director  
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Public Health Committee

Friday, March 6, 2009

Written testimony opposing sections 3, 4, and 5 of HB 6539, An Act Concerning  
Environmental Health

Senator Harris, Representative Ritter, and members of the Committee:

Environment Connecticut submits this testimony opposing provisions of Raised House Bill 6539 that repeal certain statutory provisions requiring the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health to establish regulations protecting the public from exposure to unsafe levels of radon in drinking water.

Environment Connecticut specifically opposes the following sections of this bill:

Section 3 repeals a statutory requirement that boards of education implement an inspection and evaluation program for radon in water serving public schools constructed or renovated after 2003.

Section 4 repeals a statutory requirement that the Department of Public health adopt regulations "establishing safe levels of radon in potable water."

Section 5 repeals a nearly twenty year old statutory requirement that the Department of Public Health adopt regulations establishing "acceptable levels of radon in ambient air and drinking water in schools." It replaces this with language authorizing, but not requiring, the department to adopt regulations merely governing procedures for measuring the levels of radon in the air in schools.

Exposure to airborne radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer. Drinking water that contains high radon levels increases the risk of stomach cancer. This committee and the General Assembly as a whole should reject any consideration of repeal of these sections of statute that serve to protect residents of this state, *particularly school children* from excessive exposure to radon. If the Department of Public Health has failed to properly implement these statutory provisions despite, in at least one instance having had nearly twenty years to do so, then the General Assembly should take steps to hold the department accountable for that failure.

I would like to note for the record two points that are pertinent to my testimony on this subject.

1. Yesterday, (March 5, 2009) I received an email from a resident of Columbia, Connecticut whose neighborhood is served by a community well owned and operated by the Connecticut Water Company. Recently, when a home in that neighborhood was being sold, its water was tested for radon and discovered to contain levels of 20,000 pCi/L, far in excess of the accepted safe levels. US EPA has proposed (but not adopted) a requirement that public water suppliers reduce radon levels in drinking water supplies to 4,000 pCi/L in states that implement a "enhanced radon in indoor air program" and 300 pCi/L in states that do not do so.

When other residents of the same neighborhood tested their water, they discovered similarly high levels of radon were present. According to the individual who contacted me, the water company response to the residents of this neighborhood was that the company has no responsibility to mitigate the problem in part *because the state has not established regulations requiring them to do so*. As a result, the homeowners are now being forced to choose between paying to mitigate this radon problem themselves, or doing nothing and exposing their families to the cancer risk associated with radon exposure.

2. While I have submitted this testimony in my capacity as director of Environment Connecticut, I am also the Chairman of the Board of Education of the town of Portland, Connecticut. Our community is in an area of the state which commonly experiences high radon levels. I believe we have a moral responsibility to take all necessary steps to protect the health and safety of each student and staff member who spend their days in our schools. Protecting our children and our teachers from exposure to substances known to increase the risk of cancer is an obviously necessary step towards meeting that responsibility. Unfortunately, this legislation sends a message to boards of education statewide that it is acceptable to ignore potential radon exposures in our schools if they find mitigating such exposures to be inconvenient.

***Ensuring the health and safety of school children in is not something that should be ignored in the interest of convenience or cost-savings.***

Environment Connecticut urges the committee to delete sections 3, 4 and 5 of this bill in their entirety.

Sincerely,

Christopher Phelps  
Program Director  
Environment Connecticut