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Testimony to the Public Health Committee

Raised Bill 5477, An Act Concerning the Clean Water Act and Stream Flow Regulations

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The South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority (SCCRWA) is a non-profit, public corporation and political subdivision of the State. Our mission is to provide our customers with high quality water at a reasonable cost while promoting the preservation of watershed land and aquifers. We provide approximately 51 million gallons of water per day to an estimated 430,000 consumers in our region. The source of this water is a system of watershed and aquifer areas that cover about 120 square miles within 24 municipalities. More than 27,000 acres of these watershed and aquifer areas are protected as open space as a result of the Authority's efforts and efforts with partners. Within the 20 member towns of our water district, we own and operate a public water system, which includes 10 active reservoirs, 4 surface water treatment plants and 7 ground water treatment plants.

The SCCRWA would like to thank the committee for raising HB 5477 that highlights the importance of the state doing a comprehensive basin and water supply planning. For much too long, stakeholders, regulators and legislators have been trying to cope with making water use decisions on a piece-meal basis. In 2005 the legislature passed PA 05-142 that requires the Department of Environmental Protection to develop balanced stream flow regulations that protect the state's aquatic life while providing for the needs of public health and safety, economic development and agriculture. The proposed regulations filed by DEP in October fail to meet that statutory requirement, we believe, primarily because (1) there is no state-wide water resource plan in place to help guide major public policy decisions such as stream flow and (2) regulation of water is governed by four state agencies each having a different slice of the pie.

Water is a key element for a prosperous and healthy community. Healthy streams and aquatic resources are an essential part of sustaining a high quality of life in Connecticut, including countless benefits related to recreation, aesthetics, property values, education, tourism, health, and economic development. Just as critical to Connecticut's future, including regaining economic standing and protecting public health and safety, is ensuring a long-term reliable supply of public drinking water for residents, municipalities, and businesses. The SCCRWA has a long history of caring for natural environments. We fully recognize that the ways in which we manage our water system and conduct our business are integral to protecting the quality of our region's ecosystems.

The goal of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) proposed Stream Flow Standards and Regulations to balance the many diverse and legitimate uses of the state's waters while promoting healthy streams is admirable, and a well crafted stream flow regulation could greatly enhance overall management of the State of Connecticut's water resources. The SCCRWA was dismayed, however, when discussions and negotiations with stakeholders were abruptly curtailed early last year. We believe a balanced stream flow regulation is possible, but

it will require a detailed state-wide plan that includes completing basin screening and stream classifications so that regulators and stakeholders have the appropriate tools to make the public policy decisions necessary for balanced stream flow regulations.

We, therefore, would encourage the Public Health Committee, legislative leaders and other legislators to:

1. require and fund, if necessary, a comprehensive state-wide water needs study to be developed by the Commissioners of Environmental Protection and Public Health, in consultation with the Water Planning Council, including analysis of actual consumptive use from both groundwater and surface water sources to determine the quantity of water needed now and in the future by people and businesses of the state;
2. require DEP to complete the stream classifications set up in its proposed regulation and prioritize areas of concern;
3. require DEP in partnership with the CT Department of Public Health to reconvene the Commissioner's Advisory Committee and other stakeholder workgroups to assist DEP in developing a regulation that complies with the statutory mandate of "recognizing and providing for the needs and requirements" of public health, public safety and water supply; and
4. require DEP and the Department of Economic Development to complete an analysis of the cost of stream flow regulations to the state's citizens, including water ratepayers, businesses, and industry and evaluate how these costs may affect Connecticut's future economic development.

The SCCRWA thanks the Committee for considering our suggestions and would enthusiastically welcome the opportunity to constructively participate in the above efforts along with helping to elicit the involvement of other important stakeholders.