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Testimony of Rep. Mary Mushinsky (85th) in Support of PB 5725, AAC the Statewide Phosphorus Reduction Plan

Before the Planning and Development Committee
Public Hearing February 13, 2013 Room 2B

I support Proposed Bill 5725, An Act Concerning the Statewide Phosphorus Reduction Plan, but caution the Planning and Development Committee to avoid prescribing the specific method and membership of collaboration, and recognize that phosphorus removal is a federal requirement that cannot be waived. The bill is a follow up to last year's phosphorus bill SB 440 which became PA 12-155. The new law included a reference to a collaborative approach to the problem of removing phosphorus from sewage treatment discharges, which is a necessary step to achieve clean water but is expensive for the municipalities.

The goal of phosphorus removal is to remove Connecticut water bodies from the "federally impaired waters" list under the federal Clean Water Act. States are obligated to meet the federal law, and scientists have determined that phosphorus removal will be necessary to fix impaired waters in south central Connecticut and the Danbury area. At present, it is expensive for towns to remove phosphorus to the levels needed to stop algae blooms, which deplete oxygen in waterways as the algae decays. The cost of phosphorus removal is driving the need for further collaboration. I believe this cost will be reduced as advances in technology produce cheaper ways to remove the phosphorus.

Collaboration is helpful to reach a solution for the towns which will achieve clean water results in the most cost-effective manner. But we should not limit the number of

participants in collaboration, for a great many constituencies are affected by water pollution. And the requirement cannot be negotiated away because it comes directly from the federal Clean Water Act. Solutions that achieve clean water and are cost effective will likely involve both technical and financial assistance. In the technical realm, the Town of Cheshire is already using an experimental process that is achieving excellent results at less cost. In the area of financial assistance, last year's law improved the grant for phosphorus removal to 30%. With my colleagues, we have filed a bill this year to increase this grant to 50%, the same as the grant for municipalities with combined sewer overflow pollution problems.

I urge support for continued collaboration, but request the committee avoid limiting who can participate, as many constituencies are affected by polluted water. I also wish the Planning & Development Committee to recognize that the mandate to remove phosphorus is federal and not likely to change, so that collaboration should be recognized as a partnership effort to achieve-- and not avoid--federal law. Finally, I'd like to respectfully thank the co-sponsors for their continued efforts to implement a phosphorus reduction plan.