



93 West Main Street
Clinton, CT 06413
1-860-644-6055

**Testimony of Maureen Westbrook, Connecticut Water Company
Environment Committee - March 7, 2014
HB 5424 AAC *The Responsibilities of the Water Planning Council***

Connecticut Water is pleased to provide comments in **support** of **HB 5424 AAC *The Responsibilities of the Water Planning Council***. We thank the legislators who have brought renewed focus to the issue of state water planning and the Environment Committee for raising this bill.

As a public water utility, Connecticut Water serves approximately 90,000 customers or 300,000 people in 56 towns in Connecticut. We have long been stewards of the environment and strive to ensure that water resources are protected and our water utility operations are sustainable. We have been involved with various stakeholder groups over the years, working together to provide for balanced water policy in Connecticut.

We concur with comments submitted by the Connecticut Water Works Association (CWWA).

Connecticut Water strongly believes thoughtful water supply planning is critical for the protection of our state's water resources, the provision of adequate water supplies to meet the public health and safety needs of our residents, and to support smart economic development while protecting the environment, and providing recreational opportunities.

It is important that a state water plan be balanced, supported by sound data, and adequately consider all water needs. HB 5424, which updates existing law from the 1960's and directs the state's Water Planning Council to develop a state water plan, sets the stage for that process. The provisions of the bill that call for stakeholder input and consideration of existing planning documents are important to provide the necessary balance. We concur with CWWA that language should be added in Section 1(b) to explicitly require the plan to consider the quantity, quality and availability of water for public water supply needs and to require that a state water plan be approved by a unanimous vote of the Council.

The Water Planning Council, which is statutorily established and includes the four agencies which each have a role in regulating water in Connecticut, is the appropriate entity to take the lead on the state water plan. Further, the Water Planning Council Advisory Group, also established by statute, has stakeholders with a balance between consumptive and nonconsumptive uses, and environmental interests. Members of the advisory group represent water, wastewater, agriculture, electric power generation, business and industry, environmental land protection, river protection, boating, fisheries, recreation, endangered species, and members of academia with expertise in stream flow, public health and ecology. The depth of knowledge between the agencies that comprise the WPC and the members of the Advisory Group is significant and particularly well suited to advance the dialogue and develop a well-balanced state water plan.

There has already been a significant body of work developed through the WPC process, but the WPC has lacked staff or resources to formally develop a comprehensive state water plan. The funding provided in this bill seeks to address that gap.

The bill specifically notes in Section 1(a) that, among other things, the state water plan should integrate Water Utility Coordinating Committee plans (WUCC plans). We believe this will provide critical information for any comprehensive and effective water planning effort. The WUCC plans, required by Section 25-33c through 25-33h of the CGS, are designed to maximize efficient and effective development of the state's public water supply systems and to promote public health, safety and welfare through coordinated planning of public water supply systems. While it is certainly not the only information required, these public water supply plans are a critical component that need to be considered in any meaningful state water planning effort. Having data on current and projected water supply needs across the state, based on an objective analysis of state and local planning documents, and understanding how those water supply needs will be met, is essential to making informed decisions in any state water plan. We applaud that Section 8(b) of the bill includes funding for the Department of Public Health for consultants to complete the WUCC process and urge you to maintain such funding.

Section 1(b) of the bill requires that the plan "meet data collection and analysis needs to provide for data driven water planning and permitting decisions." We share the view of other stakeholders that sound data is key to good decision making. Much data has been provided through the years by the regulated community to the agencies in permit applications or in compliance reporting but because it is housed within different agencies and there is no consistent reporting format or common clearinghouse, that data is not readily usable by the agencies for permitting or for sound planning. As such, we would urge that at least a portion of the funds in Section 8(a) provided to the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) to facilitate the completion of the plan be used to develop and support data collection systems and modeling methods necessary to make informed planning and permitting decisions. We suggest that it may be best to ensure that any funding mechanism be sufficiently flexible to allow funds to be directed to agency staff and/or consultants to support the data collection and planning effort.

We urge the committee to support the provisions in Section 6 that provide for the creation of a Licensed Water Professional (LWP). This would reduce the administrative and staffing burdens of DPH and facilitate timely review of applications or other requests to DPH submitted on behalf of the applicant by a qualified LWP. Particularly, in this time of budget constraints, this is an innovative and cost effective ways to carry out provisions of the DPH programs. We would note that subsection (a) of Section 6 is already in effect, whereby DPH can already delegate its authority to carry out provisions of the statutes on their behalf to outside agents or engineers. CWWA has suggested some language changes for this section that we concur would help further clarify the intent and implementation of the program.

We thank the Committee for raising HB 5424 and ask for your support of the bill. We stand ready to work with members of the Committee, our water industry colleagues, and other stakeholders to revise the language, as appropriate to accomplish the desired goals of the legislation. If you have questions please contact Maureen Westbrook at 1-860-664-6055 or mwestbrook@ctwater.com.