

Testimony on H.B.5424

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To the Joint Committee on the Environment:

Thank you for holding this public hearing. Thank you to the co-sponsors of this bill, Representative John Hampton, Phillip Miller and Jonathan Steinberg for putting forward H.B.5424 which requires the development of a state water plan. The State needs such a plan to ensure that its residents benefit from a fair, cost-effective and environmentally sound system for the distribution of safe drinking water. Part of the impetus of this renewed effort to establish a state water plan comes from the controversy last year over how UCONN should obtain the additional water it has determined that it needs. That controversy brought to light for people like me who are ordinary citizens the fact no such state-wide plan exists. I am grateful for the renewed effort to create such a plan.

I am not by any means an expert on water policy. I do understand that the issues involved in establishing a state water plan are complex, so I will comment only on those things I think I can reasonably address. In regard to H.B. 5424, I am very glad to see that it requires the Water Planning Council to develop a plan that addresses the “ecological, environmental and economic impact” of the plan rather than just the issues of the quality and quantity of water that could be available from various water sources. That is very important. Ecological, environmental and economic issues are in the long run public health issues even if they don’t appear to be in the immediate future.

It is also good that the bill calls for the water plan to include water conservation guidelines and incentives.

One concern I have about this bill stems from my involvement in last year’s UCONN water controversy. That experience has made it clear that there will be very powerful economic and political interests involved in developing a state water plan. In the face of those forces, the best interests of ordinary citizens often face an uphill battle. H.B. 5424 requires that agricultural, recreational, industrial and commercial uses of water bodies be taken into account in the water plan, and it also requires that ecological, environmental and economic impacts of the water plan be considered. How can citizens tell how much weight might be given to any particular factor in decision making and how can one ensure that both the goal and the result of the decision making is the greatest good for the greatest number of people?

As you consider any changes you decide to make in this bill, please give serious attention to the suggestions and concerns raised by people and organizations with the public interest at heart and with deeper knowledge than I on the specifics of how a state water plan should be developed.

Many thanks again to those who have brought this H.B 5424 forward and to the Joint Committee on the Environment for the opportunity to speak.