



The Metropolitan District
water supply • environmental services • geographic information

Planning and Development Committee
March 14, 2014

Senate Bill 332: An Act Amending the Charter of the Metropolitan District in Hartford County

Testimony by:

William A. DiBella, Chairman
Metropolitan District

My name is William A. DiBella, and I serve as the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of The Metropolitan District, commonly known as the MDC. I have been a Commissioner of the MDC for 35 years, and have served as its Chairman for over 15 years. On behalf of the MDC's Board of Commissioners, I offer the following testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 332. This bill is the product of significant opposition to a decision made by the MDC to increase the nonmember service charge to \$105 per quarter. It is important to note that, resulting, in part, from the significant concerns expressed by nonmember customers at a MDC public hearing held in December, this quarterly charge has been reduced to \$49 per quarter.

The MDC is a regional, specially chartered municipal corporation comprised of eight member towns – Bloomfield, East Hartford, Hartford, Newington, Rocky Hill, West Hartford, Wethersfield, and Windsor – that provides public water and sanitary sewer services to its members and a portion of several nonmember towns. Formed in 1929, the MDC was one of the first experiments in regionalism in Connecticut, and has a proud record of service to its member towns and the community in general. Of its 29 commissioners, 17 are appointed by the legislative body of our member towns, 8 by the Governor, and 4 by legislative leadership.

The MDC strongly opposes the bill before you today. For some time, legislators and policy makers have touted the benefits of regional cooperation and mutual aid. Fundamentally, it has been posited that essential services can be more economically and efficiently delivered to the public on a regional basis. This has certainly been proven the case where the MDC is concerned. The cost of water and sewer services to our eight member towns, if delivered on a town by town, individual basis, would far exceed the cost of providing those services through our regional agency. Clearly, there have been significant front end costs, ongoing liabilities and financial commitments and risks borne by our eight towns to the exclusion of nonmember towns. This must be recognized. To provide water at the same cost to nonmember town customers extends the benefits of regional cooperation to towns that have decided, for whatever reason, not to join this regional entity. Rather than incentivizing regional cooperation, this bill would have the opposite effect. It sends the message that a town need not bear the initial cost of joining, can continue to avoid any ongoing liabilities and financial exposure, but still reap the benefits created by the eight member towns that willingly accepted and paid the cost to create the MDC. It is akin to "renting" our system while enjoying all the benefits, without the responsibilities, of owner-

ship. There **should** be an additional cost to nonmember town customers for enjoying the benefits, while avoiding the burden, of the creation of a water infrastructure and delivery system that they decided not to contribute to. Without this infrastructure, it would be impossible for them to access MDC water. There is a solution for non-member towns to avoid the nonmember town charge – becoming a member of the MDC. While this option would entail some upfront costs, the long terms benefits are immeasurable.

That being stated, please note that presently, and in all likelihood for as long as the bonds for the MDC's Clean Water Project are being paid by member town customers **only**, non-member town customers, under the current rate structure, pays **less** for MDC water than a member town customer.

There are benefits and burdens to MDC membership. Our towns assume certain liabilities, extend their full faith and credit for borrowing purposes, and accept the financial responsibility to make sure our water and sewer systems are regulatory compliant and deliver these public services efficiently without interruption. To allow nonmember towns to set MDC policy and dilute the authority of our existing town membership again provides a benefit without any corresponding burden. The investment by member towns upon joining and remaining a part of the MDC confers on those towns voting rights to the exclusion of nonmember towns.

We urge the Planning and Development Committee to reject Senate Bill 332.