

Testimony of Barbara McCarthy
Before the Public Health Committee

In Opposition to
H.B. 5543 AN ACT CONCERNING WATER QUALITY

Submitted by
Barbara McCarthy
March 17, 2013

Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in opposition to HB 5543, AAC Water Quality. This bill would weaken protections on the water company lands that filter our public drinking water supply.

I care about this issue because the impact of development near drinking water reservoirs, including chemical runoff from roads and yards, is of great concern to me. The Department of Public Health should continue to have full authority to evaluate all proposals that would change the use of land that filter our drinking water. Currently, whenever a water company wants to change the use of water company land, they must apply to the Department of Public Health to get a permit for the change. The bill refines “change of use” to mean only a change that would be inconsistent with water supply purposes and negatively affect water quality or purity. But that is backwards—whether a proposed change would negatively affect water quality is a judgment that DPH should make when it evaluates a given permit, not a claim that the water company should make ahead of time. This changed definition would give the water companies too much discretion to make changes in use without applying to DPH for a permit, eliminating a key point of oversight and approval from the Commissioner of Public Health.

Section 2 of the bill is also concerning. This section would allow private professionals, hired by the water companies, to evaluate water company proposals. Currently the Commissioner of Public Health performs this crucial duty. Relying on professionals being paid by the water companies to do the job of the department would further reduce independent oversight and could endanger public health.

Please oppose HB 5543 and keep drinking water lands protected. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
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