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SUPPORT - HB-5543 - AN ACT CONCERNING WATER QUALITY

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) *supports* the provisions in **HB-5543**, which narrow the definition of activities that warrant a “Change of Use” permit from the state Department of Public Health (DPH) to exclude activities that are performed to maintain or upgrade municipal water systems.

Under the current process, DPH requires a change of use permit for anything that constitutes “one shovel of dirt”. This captures a wide range of routine activities that require municipal water staff to submit a permit application with detailed information to the department and wait for approval to perform what are clearly maintenance tasks, such as stone revetment. In addition to unnecessarily tying up the resources of municipal staff, this requirement also delays projects that need to be completed under certain weather conditions or during certain times of the year.

COST also supports provisions in the bill which authorize the Department of Public Health to create a Licensed Water Professional program to assist them, at the request of the applicant, in processing certain applications. Municipalities often find it difficult to move forward with various municipal economic development projects given the number of approvals required from various state agencies. This would create a mechanism for addressing the backlog in this department and ensure that the applications were reviewed by individuals with the necessary expertise.

This type of program, the Licensed Environmental Professional program, has worked very well in expediting brownfields remediation projects. We urge your support for the bill with revisions as recommended by the Connecticut Water Works Association (CWWA).

COST is an advocacy organization committed to giving small towns a strong voice in the legislative process. Its members are Connecticut towns with populations of less than 30,000. COST champions the major policy needs and concerns of Connecticut’s suburban and rural towns.

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