Testimony in support of Substitute SB 422

From: Brooke S. Stutzman  
251 Niantic River Rd  
Waterford, CT 06385

Hearing date: Friday, 11 March 2016


Planning and Development Committee:

I am not an activist. I leave that to people with more determination to fight than I have. I am, however, a Professor of Physics and, with my colleagues, have developed a course in Climate Change Science. I live in SE CT so I didn’t become aware of this issue until a friend from when I lived near Hartford shared a post on Facebook about what was happening to a large portion of CT’s water supply.

Being a scientist, I feel compelled to provide you factual rather than anecdotal information. There are so many reasons that selling CT’s water to Niagara at a reduced rate is wrong morally and ethically. I’ll rely on others to fill in those details.

I begin with a quote from Sander van der Linden’s paper in Environment and Behavior “Exploring Beliefs about Bottled Water and Intentions to Reduce Consumption: The Dual-Effect of Social Norm Activation and Persuasive Information” (published online 20 December 2013).

Bottled water is often referred to as one of capitalism’s greatest mysteries: “The packaging and selling of something that is already freely available” (Queiroz, Rosenberg, Heller, Zhouri, & Silva, 2012, p. 328). Indeed, while in many countries perfectly safe water from the tap is offered at little or no cost (Wilk, 2006), the consumption of bottled water around the world has exploded in the past decade, increasing vastly and steadily (Beverage Marketing Corporation [BMC], 2012). In the United States alone, more than 30 billion bottles of commercially produced water are sold every year (Gleick, 2010). On average, it takes about 3 liters of regular water to produce 1 liter of bottled water (Pacific Institute [PI], 2007), at 2011 consumption rates, that amounts to a wastage of over a 100 billion liters of water a year. This is happening at a time when scarcity of fresh water—one of the earth’s most treasured natural resources—is becoming a rapidly increasing concern, currently affecting every continent in the world (Food and Agricultural Organization [FAO], 2007) and likely to be exacerbated by climate change (Bates, Kundzewicz, Wu, & Palutikof, 2008). In fact, the latest report on global water usage already speaks of a “global water crisis” (Gleick, 2011). Access to fresh water is also becoming a salient issue for the general public as concerns over drinking water were ranked highest among a total of eight environmental issues in a recent poll (Gallup, 2010)…. 
Water bottles are often made out of polyethylene terephthalate (PET). While PET is recyclable, only a third of all water bottles produced in the United States were actually recycled in 2012 (National Association for Pet Container Resources [NAPCOR], 2013) and thus a majority of the waste is going to landfills if not ending up as litter on land, in rivers, and oceans (Olson, 1999). The production of bottled water is also highly inefficient, wasting tremendous amounts of water in the process (PI, 2007). Furthermore, in 2011, it took more than 2.5 million tons of carbon dioxide (CO2) to produce the amount of bottled water required for U.S. consumption—as energy is needed for packaging, transportation, and refrigeration (Gleick & Cooley, 2009). Thus, next to not only wasting a valuable resource, the production and consumption of bottled water also has a significant and damaging impact on the natural environment and contributes to climate change.

Moreover, the general public is generally not aware of the fact that harmful toxic chemicals such as antimony can leach from PET bottles (Shotyk, Krachler, & Chen, 2006) and accordingly, numerous contamination incidents have been reported (Gleick, 2004). In addition, bottled water companies do not have to adhere to the same quality control and accountability standards as public drinking water sources (Olson, 1999). In fact, a significant amount of studies, conducted in a wide range of countries have consistently indicated that just because water comes out of a bottle, this is no guarantee whatsoever that it is any safer or cleaner than water from the tap (e.g., Ahmad & Bajahlan, 2009; Lalumandier & Ayers, 2000; Olson, 1999; Raj, 2005; Saleh et al., 2008; Saleh, Ewane, Jones, & Wilson, 2001). In summary, bottled water consumption is a viable candidate for water conservation, as the negative environmental and societal impacts associated with its use can be avoided by drinking tap water instead (Saylor, Propoky, & Amberg, 2011).

Summarize these data show that:

- Water is freely available at little cost from the tap
- 30 billion bottles of “commercially produced” water are sold in the U.S. every year (not that this refers to 2010 data – the number is likely higher now.)
- It takes about three liters to produce one liter of bottled water – which is equivalent to wasting 100 billion liters (approximately 30 billion gallons) yearly
- Climate change is making access to fresh water critical in many regions
- Polyethylene terephthalate (PET) is recyclable, but two thirds of water bottles in the US are not recycled
- In 2011, it took 2.5 million tons of CO2 to produce the amount of bottled water used in the U.S. (For comparison, one metric ton of CO2 is released to the atmosphere for every 103 gallons of gasoline used. For comparison, using a car that gets 25 miles to the gallon, that’s just a bit more than 2,500 miles—about two months of driving for many Americans (Joe Abraham, ASU Southwest Climate Change Network).)
- Chemicals like antimony can leach form the bottles into the water.
- Bottled water is not subject to the same quality control as public drinking water.
So, bottled water is bad, or at least no better than tap water. But it takes three times the amount of water to make one bottle of water than it takes to draw that same drinkable amount from the tap.

Speaking directly to the points in Senator Bye’s Bill:

- **Protect residents, not water bottlers during a drought.** With the climate rapidly changing, we need to protect our residents, not a major corporation in the case of a drought. Right now, it looks like we have “plenty” of water, but we’re in an unprecedented time of rapidly changing weather. We do not and cannot know if we will still be in a time of “plenty” ten, or even five, years from now.

- **Rescind water rate discounts for water bottlers.** In my argument above, I think that I substantially cover this point. The only “person” who wins in bottling water is the CEO of the company. The low-wage worker doesn’t win. The citizens, who could have the same water for much less from their tap, don’t win. And the environment, the pristine reservoirs and rivers that make the MDC watershed a vacation destination don’t win. Maybe we won’t notice the reduced current or depth of the reservoirs, but the last thing we need is to encourage more people to carry single-use bottles along for their hikes and river adventures. No one wants to look at that trash. Besides, if the bottles are not recycled, which most are not, they’ll be incinerated and that leads to more toxins. Or, they’ll rest in our landfills for generations to come.

- **Rescind the Special Sewer Service Charge discount for water bottlers (now known as the Clean Water Project Charge).** Why would you give a break to potentially your biggest sewer usage customer? Local taxes and fees are to maintain and rebuild the infrastructure. Niagara has the potential for testing the limits of the sewer service due to its high rate of consumption and expulsion of water. What happens if the old pipes don’t hold up? They aren’t going to pay. The tax-payers will. These kinds of water-main and sewer line breaks are becoming increasingly common in the town in which I was born, Latrobe, PA. I’m not saying that it’s related to the old Le Nature bottling facility – it’s more likely due to the age of the infrastructure, but whomever is now operating the bottling plant (Castle Co-Packers, LLC) is not helping with the repairs.

- **Re-establish a citizen MDC (Metropolitan District Commission) watch dog committee.** This seems obvious. Why didn’t anyone know or realize about this deal until Niagara was ready to break ground?

- **Impose a moratorium on any new large capacity agreements until the State Water Plan is completed and addresses the issue of water bottling companies diverting water out of watersheds.** We cannot get back the water once we lose it. If we are going to sell our natural resources, we must study both the short and long term environmental impact.

Thank-you for your consideration,
Brooke S. Stutzman
References


