



## **TESTIMONY to the Planning and Development Committee CT General Assembly**

RE: SB 422, An Act Concerning Residential Water Rates, Public Drinking Water Supply Emergencies and Sellers of Bottled Water

*Submitted by Anne B. Hulick, State Director, Clean Water Action*

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Miller and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to make these remarks. Clean Water Action is a million member national public interest organization that has been working to protect our nation's waters since we led the passing of the original Clean Water Act more than forty years ago.

Today, Connecticut is at a crossroads concerning the protection and stewardship of water resources, a crossroads that will become more pronounced as climate change advances. According to the NOAA Drought Monitor, most of Connecticut is actually in a mild drought situation as of February 2016. We see S.B. 422 as a wise and powerful way to address dangers to our water supply and quality now and in the face of a changing climate. We offer recommendations to strengthen the bill for that purpose.

Let me begin by describing a series of wakeup calls that have brought Clean Water Action into sharply increased involvement in state water politics. Over the year-end holidays, we were contacted by a group of alarmed citizens in Bloomfield who had just read in the paper that Niagara Bottling had been awarded a tax abatement for a new production facility by their Town Council. These were not just any citizens. They were members of the town's Conservation, Energy and Environment Committee.

They found out that the proposal had passed Inland Wetlands review without Niagara being identified as the actual applicant. They learned that the tax abatement could legally be given to Niagara before any environmental review of the manufacturing facility itself, the traffic impacts, or the environmental impacts of the bottles produced there. They discovered that state environmental reviews for such proposals are handled by DEEP, the Department of Health, the MDC and other agencies without a clear portal of public information on the ground rules or process. They learned that Niagara had been exploring options with Bloomfield for more than a year, and had sharpened its focus here after a similar proposal was brought to light by citizen scrutiny in Kingston, New York.

The deal between the MDC and the town of Bloomfield without input from other MDC towns, forces us all to face the fact that Connecticut's historic approach to managing water resources is a mismatch for the era we are entering, a time that calls for new levels of caution and transparency and demands holistic thinking, coordination and long-range planning. As the state embarks on an important water planning process, we have an opportunity to establish a new, integrated review process for development proposals affecting our waters. In the meantime, decisions of this magnitude simply should not be made outside of the policy framework that is being developed for an era of climate change. And large-volume water extractors should not benefit more in the process than the residents of this state that pay for the infrastructure that assures clean and safe drinking water.

**S.B. 422 could not be more timely or more important to pass.**

This bill, with proposed revisions, will bring critical protection to Connecticut's citizens and waters by making a priority commitment to in-state uses of water to meet basic needs, over extraction for export and re-sale. It adjusts the incentive so that exporters of water do not have financial advantage over ordinary consumers, and do not take precedence over local homes, businesses and services in the event of a drought. And it should be a vehicle for improving oversight of the MDC in the meantime by re-establishing a citizen advisory committee and setting new standards for transparency in water management decisions that affect us all.

We recommend strengthening the bill by including language to:

- **Protect residents, not water bottlers during a drought.** If the DPH declares a Drought Advisory, the production of bottled water for export out of state needs to stop.
- **Rescind water rate discounts for water bottlers.** They extract large amounts of our municipal water and spring water, fill the environment with plastic pollution, and profit while citizens are conserving and paying more.
- **Rescind the *Special Sewer Service Charge* discount for water bottlers (now known as the *Clean Water Project Charge*).** CT ratepayers have paid for years to build infrastructure for clean water; no discounts for corporations.
- **Re-establish a citizen MDC (Metropolitan District Commission) watch dog committee.**
- **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.

What happened in Bloomfield is unfortunately not limited to Bloomfield. The deal by MDC impacts all other MDC towns and ultimately, every resident of the state. SB 422 with revisions, assures that this type of proposal will never happen again. We have an opportunity to assure that our state's waters are conserved, protected and prioritized for the needs of our state--now and into the future. **Clean Water Action strongly supports SB 422 with these revisions and urges its passage.**

Sincerely,



Anne Hulick, RN, MS, JD