

**Testimony of Save the Sound  
Before the Committee on the Environment**

*In support of HB 927*

**AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO THE SEWAGE RIGHT-TO-KNOW  
STATUTE.**

**Submitted by Bill Lucey, Soundkeeper.  
March 1, 2021**

*Save the Sound is a nonprofit organization representing over 4,200 member households and 10,000 activists statewide. Our mission is to protect and improve the land, air, and water of Connecticut and the entire Long Island Sound region. We use legal and scientific expertise and bring citizens together to achieve results that benefit our environment for current and future generations.*

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Cohen and Representative Borer, Vice-Chairs Gresko and Kushner, Ranking Members Harding and Miner, and all members of the Environment Committee:

Save the Sound (STS) expresses its support for HB-927 an act concerning revisions to the Sewage Right-To-Know Statute.

Save the Sound (Save the Sound) writes to ask that you to support protecting the health of the public, our waterways, and Long Island Sound by passing HB-927 out of committee. We are grateful that the committee has recognized the importance of this issue, and of protecting the public health in light of continued raw sewage discharges and spills. Just this past year a 2.3 million gallon sewage spill flowed down the Mill River into New Haven Harbor. Once again, as we saw on the Naugatuck River in 2018, the public was not notified in a timely manner and days passed before the majority of the public was aware of what happened.

This is not only a threat to those boating, fishing or swimming in the river, but to industry. In New Haven Harbor the Mill River enters close to the mouth of the Quinnipiac River. As sewage entered the harbor it is very possible that some of the sewage was carried upstream into the Quinnipiac during the tidal cycles. Aside from residences along the Quinnipiac there is an oyster business that puts out thousands of cured shells into the river to catch spat from the existing oyster beds. These seeded shells are then moved into clean waters where they become part of a 3-5 year harvest cycle. Last summer the shells were deployed right around the time of the spill and if there had been timely notification the managers may have delayed setting out shell in case it affected spat survival. It is not known yet how successful the spat set was, but if the spill caused reduction or failure of successful attachment, this could mean significant lost revenue in future seasons.

It is important that we have a strong sewage right-to-know notification system so the public is immediately aware of the threat. We have been working closely with CTDEEP and have agreed on the following changes.

**1. Some form of electronic public notification needs to happen with this revision.**

CTDEEP is currently working with contractors to redesign the public facing sewage right-to-know website to make it more user-friendly to the public. Though they were unable to include in the contract a dedicated electronic notification system discussions are ongoing about using available existing systems such as Twitter or other existing state notification vehicle. As part of this effort any updates to an ongoing spill should be updated to the website when changes occur and the public notified.

**2. All spills that reach surface waters shall be reported**

In the previous 2018 revision, a limit of 5000 gallons was placed on the public reporting requirement of a spill. Unfortunately, if an operator underestimates the size of a spill that is reaching a waterbody and doesn't report it properly then there is an unintentional violation. Removing the 5000 gallon baseline for reporting removes this problem and also reflects the reality that even a hundred gallon raw sewage spill into a small stream at low flows can be a public risk. How many of us grew up playing in small local creeks?

**3. Signs must be posted along the affected water body notifying the public that the waters are unsafe**

As additional notification a section has been added on requiring health warning signs in areas the public is likely to interact with a waterbody that is experiencing a spill.

There is a cooperative working group of advocates discussing this bill with CTDEEP and some revisions were made after the raised bill deadline. We are close to consensus on the final language which will not substantially change the main points stated above, but clarifies the language and reflects compromise on a few points especially the annual reporting requirement. This is once again due to limited staff resources. Save the Sound looks forward to working with you and other stakeholders as you consider the existing language with language modifications.

Respectfully submitted,

*/s/ Bill Lucey*

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