

Public Health Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-834

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING WATER QUALITY NOTIFICATION.

Vote Date: 3/26/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/17/2021

File No.: 449

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Public Health Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill requires tenants and lessees to be notified by owners in both commercial and residential rental properties when the water supply is tested and said tests exceed any maximum contaminant level on the Department of Public Health (DPH) drinking water action list or in the local Public Health Code. Property owners must send a copy of the test results to all tenants and lessees within 24 hours. This bill also requires the local health director to take reasonable steps to verify the property owner has notified all tenants and lessees.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Deidre S. Gifford, MD, MPH, Acting Commissioner, Department of Public Health (DPH):

Dr. Gifford and the DPH support this bill notifying and assuring residents that their drinking water is safe when property owners test the water supply.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Erin Beverly:

Ms. Beverly supports this bill because she is a renter in Connecticut and previously lived in Flint, Michigan where she had to carry bottles of drinking water everywhere in order to assure a safe drinking water supply.

Miguel Castro, Chairman, Connecticut Hispanic Democratic Caucus:

Mr. Castro supports this bill as part of continued efforts to combat environmental racism and the broader issue of systemic racism as codified in unsafe and racist policies and regulations that disproportionately harm non-white residents. Race is a more reliable indicator of proximity

to pollution and utilizing culturally relevant tools, such as Spanish language notifications, to alert people of their exposure to water contaminants is a necessary step in combatting the harmful effects of environmental racism and creating a fairer society.

Jeffrey Freiser:

Mr. Freiser supports this bill because he has been notified many times of questionable water test results via his monthly water bill. He receives this information because he is a homeowner, but he learned in his former role as the executive director of the Connecticut Housing Coalition that people of color and low-income are disproportionately home renters in Connecticut. Mr. Freiser wants people who rent their homes to be as protected from poor quality drinking water as people who own their homes. He does not want the safety of Connecticut residents drinking water to be determined by their economic status.

Alison K. McHorney, Legislative Intern, Save the Sound:

Ms. McHorney and Save the Sound support this bill because nearly 75% of Connecticut residents rely on public wells or semipublic wells for their drinking water supply. However, less than 25% of the homes in Hartford are owner-occupied. This means that most of the residents in our capitol city do not know if they are drinking, cooking and bathing in contaminated water. This bill is another step in addressing the significant environmental justice concerns faced by the state.

Brenda Watson, Executive Director, Operation Fuel:

Ms. Watson and Operation Fuel support this bill because they know that Connecticut's water regulatory system is complicated and not designed to be nimble and communicative to the most marginalized water customers. This bill empowers local health officials to communicate and manage local health issues to achieve maximum impact in a timely fashion.

Raphael L. Podolsky, Attorney and Policy Advocate, Connecticut Legal Services:

Mr. Podolsky and Connecticut Legal Services support this bill because we require other utility providers to communicate directly with the end user and not only the property owner. They want the end users of water suppliers to be held to the same standards and to provide the same protections regardless of property-owning status. Mr. Podolsky and Connecticut Legal Services request the addition of "public or municipal water supplies" be added to the bill and not limited only to public wells and semi-public wells for notification purposes.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None.

Reported by: Kate Hamilton

April 14, 2021