



**Testimony to Joint—Senate Standing Committee on Health
Senate Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation
Assembly Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation
and Assembly Standing Committee on Health**

Water Quality and Contamination

Presented by

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Good afternoon, my name is Darren Suarez. I am an energy and environmental policy analyst for The Business Council of New York State. I would like to share with you some of our thoughts regarding high-quality water and wastewater services.

The Business Council is the leading business organization in New York State, representing the interests of more than 2,400 member businesses employing more than 1 million New Yorkers. The primary function of The Business Council is to serve as an advocate for its members in policy matters affecting economic development, jobs and the general business climate in the state.

New York State, like many other states, faces real challenges to our water infrastructure. Although water infrastructure is less visible than other infrastructure, it's no less important. Our water treatment and delivery systems provide public health protection, and are a valuable component to both the manufacturing process and food preparation which has resulted in a higher quality of life.

Over the past century, many improvements in lifespan and public health are due to improvements in water quality. It wasn't that long ago that the life span of the average American was shortened due in part to sickness and death from diseases spread through drinking water. Thankfully, treatment, disinfection, and the environmental regulation of water contaminants have made our nation's drinking water one of the safest drinking water supplies in the world.

In the United States and in particularly New York we have entered the replacement era, in which we need to update and improve our aging drinking water and wastewater systems. Primarily, our drinking water infrastructure is aging and is up to 100 years old in some cases. Replacing, rebuilding and redesigning our water infrastructure will require us to address numerous challenges including: climate change impacts on water availability; the quality and location of water treatment facilities; chemical and toxin contamination of water sources; and the need to reduce the amount of energy these facilities consume. As we design and invent new solutions to address drinking water and waste water issues, we should be mindful of the importance of the transferability of those technologies to other parts of the world.

The New York Legislature and the Governor deserve credit for first acknowledging that we have significant water infrastructures deficiencies and for committing resources to address those deficiencies. An older assessment of New York's waste water infrastructure determined a total funding need of \$36.2 billion over twenty years, and a drinking water infrastructure total funding need of \$ 38.7 billion over twenty years. To address some of this need the last two New York State budgets have committed \$400 million to provide municipal water quality infrastructure grants. In addition, this year's budget included a record increase in the EPF, allowing \$20M to be dedicated towards Water Quality Improvement Programs and a \$1.5M Department of Health Water Testing Program and numerous other programs like open space acquisition, pollution prevention assistance and farm land protection that will protect the quality of our water.

Furthermore, working with the business and environmental community, the Governor and the Legislature in 2015 extended for ten years the Brownfield Cleanup Program (BCP) and the Superfund program. Both programs address current and potential sources of drinking water contamination. In the ten years since it was established, the BCP has cleaned up more than 190 contaminated sites statewide and incentivized redevelopment. In addition, lawmakers have allowed for up to \$100M to be used for the Environmental Restoration Program (ERP), which funds investigation and remediation of municipally owned brownfield sites. The ERP program provides a means for local governments to cleanup sites.

Today's focus is not specifically on infrastructure issues but on contamination. It should be noted that as our water suppliers make improvements to drinking water infrastructure and waste water treatment systems, our collective exposure to contaminants can also be addressed, as often the source of contamination is the drinking water infrastructure itself (i.e. lead from piping or treatment by-products or; chemicals used in drinking water's disinfection process). In addition, improvements in infrastructure can expand our ability to monitor our current drinking water which could lead to the discovery of other sources of drinking water contamination.

Other sources of water contamination are a real concern and a real issue and should be addressed. New York State currently has many enforcement powers and uses those powers to require potentially responsible parties to address the source(s) of contamination. Specifically, we need to recognize that New York State has significant legal and financial resources to address the impact of contaminated sites, and to require and/or implement environmental

cleanups. In cases such as Hoosick Falls and elsewhere, we need to assure that our current resources and laws are being effectively and appropriately brought to bear, prior to imposing new requirements on municipalities, businesses or private parties.

One issue that we all face is that the data connecting human health effects to chemicals in drinking water is limited, and scientists have difficulty predicting the effects of drinking small amounts of contaminants for many years. Furthermore, standards do not take into account the presence of multiple chemicals, which may increase or decrease the toxicity of a particular contaminant. More research should be conducted on contaminants and their health effects. This research should be conducted at a national level and should be done quickly, as our current rate of review of these contaminants needs to occur in a timelier manner.

Thank you for your consideration in regards to this manner.

Darren Suarez