



April 2, 2019

The Honorable Anne Gobi, Senate Chairwoman
Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture
State House Room 513, Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable William Pignatelli, House Chairman
Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture
State House Room 473F, Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Bruce Tarr, Senator for First Essex and Middlesex District
State House Room 308, Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Tram Nguyen, Representative for 18th Essex District
State House Room 33, Boston, MA 02133

RE: Support of H.751/S.490 An Act promoting awareness of sewage pollution in public waters

Dear Chairwoman Gobi, Chairman Pignatelli, and Honorable Members:

I write on behalf of the Mystic River Watershed Association in strong support of S. 490 and H. 751, An Act promoting awareness of sewage pollution in public waters.

I have the advantage among many of my colleagues of not having worked in this field my entire career. I remember my outsider's perspective: If you had told me 12 years ago that untreated human sewage goes into major American rivers and streams on a routine basis, I would have said, "No, that's 17th century London. Or at least Boston before the cleanup of Boston Harbor."

But we know that it does happen today. And we know why. We have old systems, designed for a less urbanized landscapes and fewer people. And we know that combined sewer systems in particular are very expensive to get rid of it entirely.

But what is **not** expensive is notifying the public so that they know that the pollution is happening.

Think of these as sewage spills, much the way you would think of oil spills. We would not keep oil spills a secret.

One way we would urge you to look at the costs is this. We have spent hundreds of millions of dollars – indeed billions of dollars – on the clean-up of Boston Harbor, which has been a spectacular success story. It is a tribute to the power and benefit of the Clean Water Act.

And we have spent those billions of dollars largely in an effort to protect public health.

But public health can't be protected the final mile if the public doesn't know that the pollution risk exists.

Our own studies have shown that the Mystic River, Malden River, Alewife Brook and other water bodies have elevated levels of bacteria for 48 hours after a CSO release, levels exceeding the state water quality guidelines for safe boating. We have invested in our own predictive model that helps get the word out about elevated bacteria levels to protect public health. But we non-profits can't do it alone.

The requirement to notify the public will cost a few thousand dollars a year per site. That represents a small cost per permittee.

And notification will provide outside benefit to people who use the water and live downstream from CSOs. Dr. Nathan Sanders, in separately submitted testimony, has shown that "combined sewer overflows impact low income, minority, and linguistically isolated communities in Massachusetts at dramatically higher rates."

We urge you to require polluters to go the extra few feet in this marathon to protect public health, and to support the CSO notification bill. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Andrew Hrycyna
Watershed Scientist