



The State of New Hampshire  
**Department of Environmental Services**



**Clark B. Freise, Assistant Commissioner**

January 31, 2017

The Honorable Carol McGuire  
Chair, House Executive Departments and Administration Committee  
Legislative Office Building, Room 306  
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

**Re: House Bill 540, relative to funding for climate change adaptation**

Dear Chair McGuire and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on House Bill 540, relative to funding for climate change adaptation. House Bill 540 would discontinue the Climate and Health Program and prohibit the NH Department of Health and Human Services (NHDHHS) from applying for, accepting, or expending federal funding for climate change adaptation. DHHS currently uses these funds to enhance the state's resilience and preparedness by supporting: regional public health networks and local governments through program support services; regional/local planning for extreme weather events; and interventions to strengthen response capacity. The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) opposes this bill.

While New Hampshire's weather has always varied from day to day and year to year, the long-term weather patterns were fairly stable. Summers were reliably comfortable, and winters were reliably cold and snowy. Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, those average weather patterns have been changing as New Hampshire's weather has become, on average, warmer and wetter, with winters seeing the greatest change.

The frequency and severity of extreme storms has also increased, with the state experiencing 29 federal emergency and presidential disaster declarations between 2000 and 2015. These events caused fatalities and put public safety personnel at risk. The federal government provided nearly \$240 million (in 2015 dollars)<sup>1</sup> for recovery from these events. Municipalities, businesses and residents incurred even greater financial costs that were not reimbursed. New Hampshire is expected to experience even more extreme weather events in the future, which will cause significant public health and financial impacts.

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<sup>1</sup> NHDES analysis of Federal Emergency Management Data (FEMA) available at: FEMA Disaster Declarations, [https://www.fema.gov/disasters?field\\_state\\_tid=33&field\\_disaster\\_type\\_term\\_tid=All&field\\_disaster\\_declaration\\_type\\_value=All&items\\_per\\_page=20&=GO](https://www.fema.gov/disasters?field_state_tid=33&field_disaster_type_term_tid=All&field_disaster_declaration_type_value=All&items_per_page=20&=GO)

The increasing average temperatures and shorter winters have allowed more ticks to survive. Not only has the increased survival of ticks lead to a substantial reduction in the state's moose population, but human health is at greater risk as well. In 2008 and 2012, New Hampshire had the highest reported incidence of Lyme disease in the nation. Increasing summer temperatures also put our aging population at greater risk of heat-related illness. Planning for heat events and assisting local communities to adapt to climate impacts are important services state agencies provide to our citizens.

The bipartisan *NH Coastal Risks and Hazards Commission*, which was established by the General Court (SB 163) in 2013, unanimously affirmed New Hampshire's need to prepare for these changes. The Commission's focus was to consider the impacts to New Hampshire's coastal region from storm surge, sea-level rise, and extreme precipitation and to recommend legislation, rules, and other actions to prepare for risks posed to municipalities. While their specific charge was to prepare for projected sea-level rise and other hazards such as storms, increased river flooding, and stormwater runoff, *Appendix E: Other Hazards and Risks*<sup>2</sup> of the Commission's final report specifically drew attention to the following climate-related human health impacts:

- A higher probability of heat stress, heat injuries, and deaths.
- Increases in asthma and cardiorespiratory illnesses resulting from a probable increase in unhealthy air quality days due to higher pollen and ozone levels .
- Reduced access to clean drinking water as a result of saltwater intrusion into groundwater.
- Expanded ranges for vector borne diseases like Lyme disease as well as increases in other pests and invasive species.
- Reduced travel safety due to rising groundwater levels impacting roads.
- Increases in cyanobacteria-related illness as rising temperature and ocean chemistry changes allow increased cyanobacteria and algae growth.

The Commission's report concludes that additional research and analysis are needed to prepare for both known and unknown impacts. This report and all of its 35 recommendations were unanimously accepted by all 37 members of this bipartisan commission.

The efforts described above demonstrate that the health of citizens throughout New Hampshire is vulnerable to a set of increasing threats. Passage of HB 540 would reduce the ability of the state to communicate and take action on those very real threats. While HB 540 only applies to NHDHHS, NHDES is concerned that this bill sends communities an inaccurate message that they no longer need to be concerned about engaging their residents in planning for flooding, disease, and other climate-related public health risks. In reality, these risks are affecting New Hampshire right now, and they are highly likely to increase in the future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on HB 540. If you have any questions or require further information, please contact either Craig Wright, Director of the Air Resources Division ([craig.wright@des.nh.gov](mailto:craig.wright@des.nh.gov), 271-1088) or Michael Fitzgerald, Assistant Director ([michael.fitzgerald@des.nh.gov](mailto:michael.fitzgerald@des.nh.gov), 271-6390).

Sincerely,



Clark B. Freise  
Assistant Commissioner

cc: Sponsors of HB 540: Representatives Turcotte, Sylvia, Moore, Beaudoin, Sullivan

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<sup>2</sup> NH Coastal Risks and Hazards Commission Report <http://www.nhcrhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016-CRHC-final-report.pdf>

