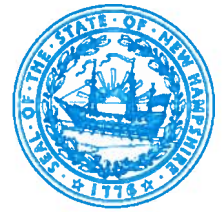




The State of New Hampshire
Department of Environmental Services



Robert R. Scott, Commissioner

January 24, 2018

The Honorable James Belanger
Chair, House Municipal and County Government Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 301
Concord, NH 03301

RE: HB 1616, An Act relative to requiring legislative approval for regional planning commissions to accept money from governmental sources other than the state of New Hampshire or its political subdivisions

Dear Chair Belanger and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 1616. HB 1616 would require a regional planning commission (RPC) to obtain legislative approval before accepting or receiving funds, grants, or services from governmental sources outside of the State of New Hampshire or its political subdivisions. The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) opposes this bill.

New Hampshire's nine RPCs are important partners in the work undertaken by NHDES. NHDES works closely with the RPCs in the development of transportation plans for the state, with the RPCs assisting in conducting federally required air quality analyses of those plans. NHDES also collaborates with the RPCs on tasks such as the development of conservation plans, conducting culvert assessments to improve resiliency, and completing storm water system evaluations. Much of the funding for this work by the RPCs comes from governmental sources other than the State of New Hampshire. Restrictions on RPC access to grants and other funding could have a negative impact on their ability to perform this work on behalf of their member communities and could result in additional costs to NHDES to complete the necessary work.

The state's RPCs rely principally on funding from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to carry out their transportation planning activities. Additionally, the four RPCs that also serve as Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) in the state receive funding from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Both of these funding sources are routed to the RPCs through the New Hampshire Department of Transportation, so it is not clear how HB 1616 would impact the ability of the RPCs and MPOs to continue to access these FHWA and FTA funds. The RPCs also often act as fiscal agents or sponsors for community-based grants. The ability of the towns and RPCs to take advantage of these funding opportunities often requires them to respond to them in a timely fashion. A requirement to obtain legislative approval, a process that could take close to a year,

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could eliminate many opportunities to compete for funding for their member communities, depending on the timing of the solicitation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on HB 1616. Should you have further questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact Rebecca E. Ohler, Administrator, Technical Services Bureau, Air Resources Division, at Rebecca.Ohler@des.nh.gov, 271-6749.

Sincerely,



Robert R. Scott
Commissioner

cc: Sponsors of HB 1616: Representatives Ammon, Pitre, Renzullo