



The State of New Hampshire
Department of Environmental Services

Robert R. Scott, Commissioner



April 24, 2023

The Honorable Kevin Avar
Chair, Energy and Natural Resources Committee
State House, Room 103
Concord, NH 03301

RE: HB 534, AN ACT relative to water assistance for natural disasters

Dear Chair Avar and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill (HB) 534. HB 534 proposes to fund, using unappropriated funds in the State Treasury, a program to provide financial assistance to low-income New Hampshire homeowners that have a water supply that has been adversely impacted by a natural disaster. Currently a similar program has been funded since 2021 by the Drinking Water and Groundwater Trust fund as authorized by the Drinking Water and Groundwater Advisory Commission. The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) supports the type of program that is proposed to be funded by HB 534. This type of program provides vital assistance to ensure that the most vulnerable residents have the necessary resources to repair or replace a private drinking water supply that has been impacted by a natural disaster. NHDES takes no position on the source of funds for supporting this type of program.

Since 2021, the State of New Hampshire has provided \$2.47M in financial assistance to 161 low-income New Hampshire homeowners whose well had been impacted by drought. Drilling a new well or connecting to a nearby community water system can cost tens of thousands of dollars. Traditionally, only public water systems have access to grants and low interest loans to mitigate water supply emergencies. Private well owners with limited incomes, on the other hand, have historically had no reliable and viable options to assist when their private water supply has failed due to a natural disaster such as a flood or drought prior to the program. Almost half of the state's population obtains their drinking water from a private well. Natural disasters due to extreme drought and flooding have substantially impacted this population in recent years and identifying an ongoing source of funding for low-income New Hampshire homeowners is critical for protecting public health.

HB 534 would require that NHDES adopt rules to administer the program. NHDES envisions that it could utilize the existing program guidelines developed by the New Hampshire Drinking Water and Groundwater Advisory Commission as a starting point for rule development and further collaborate with stakeholders to refine the program.

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Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on HB 534. Should you have any questions or require more information, please contact Brandon Kernen, Administrator of the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at 603-271-1168 or via email at Brandon.Kernen@des.nh.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert R. Scott", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert R. Scott
Commissioner

cc: Sponsors of HB 534: Representatives Boyd, Petrigno, Gould, Hakken-Phillips, and Senator Rosenwald