



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture
In Support of S.425 / H.2115 An Act relative to drought management
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As was amply demonstrated in the summer of 2016, Massachusetts does not have a policy on water management during a drought which adequately protects the people or the environment, because there is no authority to mandate water conservation. Recommendations with no authority to enforce do not work. The fact that we have had adequate rainfall so far this year should not allow us to forget three consecutive years of increasing drought problems.

This bill, sponsored by Sen. James Eldridge and Rep. Carolyn Dykema, creates the ability to address drought on a state-wide basis and make recommendations for restrictions, and for the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs to mandate restrictions uniformly across an area. The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports this bill.

It is essential to give the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs the authority to require, with penalties for failure to comply, water use restrictions of all users, except for agriculture. As this bill requires, there should be no distinction made according to whether the immediate source is a public water supply or a private well. Both draw from the same aquifer, and the regulations on usage should not differentiate. Further, there are currently great variations within a region on recommendations for water conservation, resulting in adverse environmental impacts and unfairness to users.

Sen. Eldridge's and Rep. Dykema's bill addresses these issues in a thoughtful and workable manner.

Since 1983, the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts has supported means to ensure adequate and equitable distribution of the Commonwealth's water resources under all situations and supports mandated water conservation measures through a variety of means, including sanctions against those who violate distribution mandates.

The LWVMA urges the committee to use this summer's respite from drought to enact this bill and thus be prepared for the future.

Thank you for your consideration.