



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture
In Support of S.535/H.762: *An Act relative to maintaining adequate water supplies through effective
drought management*

By Carolyn Lee, LWVMA Specialist on Water Resources
October 29, 2019

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 actual authority to mandate water conservation. Recommendations with no authority to enforce were demonstrated not to work. The fact that we currently have adequate rainfall and are mostly recovered from severe drought should not allow us to forget three consecutive years of increasing drought problems.

These bills, sponsored by Sen. Bruce Tarr and Rep. Carolyn Dykema, create 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 these bills. Uniformity of restrictions across the Commonwealth and including private wells is the equitable way to manage a common resource.

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 these bills require, 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. Tarr's and Rep. Dykema's bills address these issues in a thoughtful and workable manner.

Since 1983, the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, representing 47 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, 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 move these bills quickly in this session.

Thank you for your consideration.