



Testimony submitted to the
Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
In Support of H.861/S.475: An Act relative to maintaining adequate water supplies through effective
drought management
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As was amply demonstrated in the summers of 2016, 2020, and 2022, Massachusetts regularly experiences significant droughts. Massachusetts lacks 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 monitored by an enforcement authority are essential. We must address this problem on a state-wide equal footing for all users.

This bill, sponsored by Sen. James Eldridge and Rep. Joan Meschino, 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 again for the third consecutive session, and we are eager to see its passage.

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. In my own neighborhood, a stream that feeds the Sudbury River and was “perennial” for over 30 years actually went totally dry in the summer of 2016 and 2022 and went down to puddles in 2020. Meanwhile the watering bans are ignored and people with wells drawing from the same aquifer for lawn watering are exempted. This is not sound policy. Sen. Eldridge’s and Rep. Meschino’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, with over 3,000 members and 44 local Leagues from Capes Cod and Ann to the Berkshires, urges the committee to report this bill favorably, and thus be prepared for the future.

Thank you for your consideration.