



January 19, 2018

Dear House and Senate Leadership,

The undersigned individuals and organizations are writing to voice our strong support for core provisions of the two water quality funding bills introduced this session. Both S. 260 in the Senate and H. 564 in the House establish long term funding for water quality improvements by creating a Clean Water Authority. We strongly support the idea of an independent authority charged with cleaning up Vermont's contaminated surface waters. However, we have equally strong concerns that the bill must be amended to require revenue collection by the Clean Water Authority itself and not Vermont's local governments or a State agency.

The chief innovation of the proposed Authority is not the creation of parcel based fees for clean water improvement projects. Rather, the innovation derives from combining accountability for making cost effective investments to clean up the waters of the State with the ability to raise the funds to do so through a statewide parcel fee. This combination of independence, accountability, and financial capacity is what allows the Authority to produce results. The current bills leave too much on the table by not vesting the Clean Water Authority with the ability to both raise funds and be accountable for how those funds are spent. As currently conceived, we fear the Authority will lose its independence and the Legislature and Administration will lose their ability to hold a singular entity accountable for results.

The Act 73 Working Group spent months exploring whether the Tax Department or Vermont's local governments could collect a parcel based clean water fee, however both the Tax Department and local governments filed strident opposition to collecting such a fee and submitted compelling evidence that neither would be particularly effective or efficient at the task. We agree, and so did the Act 73 Working Group. Do we really want a landmark revenue source for Clean Water to be collected by entities who are opposed to doing so?

The signatories of this letter represent a diverse set of interests. Rarely do we see businesses, municipalities, environmental advocates, and regional planners aligned on a proposed policy solution of this magnitude. What unites us is the innovation behind a true Clean Water Authority that marries accountability for clean water with the ability to directly raise funds for clean water and complete clean water improvement projects across the state.

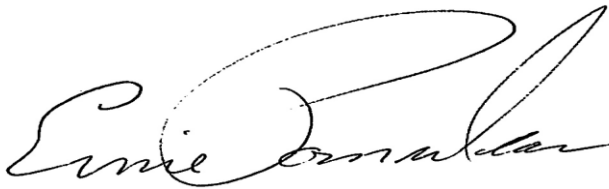
To be clear, we commend Senators Bray and Lyons and Representative Deen for their leadership and courage on this difficult issue. We urge the Legislature to follow their lead and improve these bills by vesting this new Authority with the ability to directly raise the funds and be directly accountable for producing results. Please find enclosed a statement of core principles we believe must be included in any final bill that creates a Vermont Clean Water Authority.

Sincerely,



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Tom Torti, President, Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce



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Ernie Pomerleau, Pomerleau Real Estate



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Karen Horn, Director of Public Policy, Vermont League of Cities and Towns



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Jon Groveman, Policy Director, Vermont Natural Resources Council

Lauren Hierl

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Lauren Hierl, Political Director, Vermont Conservation Voters

D. Cloud

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Dominic Cloud, City Manager, St. Albans, Vermont



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Lori Fisher, Executive Director, Lake Champlain Committee