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Lake Champlain Committee
Jenny Patterson, Executive Director
(802) 658-1421
lcc@lakechamplaincommittee.org
www.lakechamplaincommittee.org

Veto of Salt Reduction Bill Will Delay Protection of Drinking Water, Infrastructure, and Aquatic Life from Chloride Contamination

May 7, 2026 – The Lake Champlain Committee expressed disappointment with Governor Phil Scott’s veto of S.218, a bill intended to reduce the excessive use of road salt on roads and sidewalks in Vermont. Chloride contamination leaches into the ground and impacts drinking water sources, corrodes infrastructure and vehicles, and harms aquatic plants and animals. This veto will delay efforts to address high salt levels, which have received bipartisan support in the legislature.

“It’s unfortunate that Governor Scott did not take this opportunity to get ahead of a growing chloride contamination problem in Vermont’s waters,” said Lake Champlain Committee Executive Director Jenny Patterson “S.218 would have established a voluntary program with the incentive of limited liability for participants. Without reduction of the use of road salt, chloride contamination in Vermont waters will continue to grow and may eventually require mandatory reductions.”

S.218 would have created a program within Vermont’s Agency of Natural Resources and Agency of Transportation to certify participating salt applicators based on their training and use of best management practices already utilized in other states, including the successful Green SnowPro program in New Hampshire. Those municipalities and businesses choosing to become certified would gain liability protections, an approach that has gained broad acceptance in New Hampshire. However, participation would not have been required for any salt applicators.

Spelling out exactly how the liability protections would operate was a key focus during legislative discussion of S.218 as well as earlier versions of the bill heard during the 2025 session, S.29 and H.86. Both the Senate and House Judiciary Committees heard extensive

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testimony and made changes to ensure the program struck a balance between safe winter surfaces and salt reduction. Nevertheless, in his explanation of the veto, Governor Scott portrayed S.218's program as mandatory and ignored its provisions to reduce liability for those choosing to enroll in the program. Instead, the Governor told the General Assembly to repeat the extensive work it has already done and to craft unspecified new liability protections.

Ironically, vetoing S.218's voluntary program could hasten the need for mandatory reductions in the future to reduce impacts for some streams that are heavily contaminated with salt. The current increase of chloride pollution can be compared to phosphorus discharge into Vermont waters and Lake Champlain.

"Vetoing S.218 is short-sighted and a missed opportunity," said Lake Champlain Committee Board Chair Gary Kjelleren. "Currently, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency requires mandatory reductions for phosphorus entering Lake Champlain that contributes to cyanobacteria blooms. Similar statewide mandatory reductions could be required for chloride in the future. Imagine if fifteen or twenty years ago, Vermont put in place voluntary reductions for phosphorus. Maybe we wouldn't need those mandatory reductions today."

Formed in 1963, the Lake Champlain Committee (LCC) is a bi-state nonprofit organization solely dedicated to protecting Lake Champlain's health and accessibility. LCC uses science-based advocacy, education, and collaborative action to protect and restore water quality, safeguard natural habitats, foster stewardship, and ensure recreational access.

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