



Southern Maine Regional Water Council

NEWS RELEASE

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Water Utilities Propose Bill That Embraces Regionalism

As costs continue to rise and the public demands lower prices, Governor Baldacci recently renewed his call for local governments to work together to find solutions. Water utilities have taken the challenge to 'reinvent government' and proposed legislation to create Maine Regional Water Councils.

LD 1162 – An Act To Permit the Establishment of Regional Water Councils would allow for the creation of water councils. They would act similarly to councils of governments by providing water utilities with opportunities to reduce expenses through cost sharing and improve eligibility for federal funds. The councils would be voluntary, non-profit organizations that provide its members common services like purchasing, planning, billing, accounting, and customer service.

"I am pleased to be able to bring this bill forward, and I commend Maine water utilities for taking the initiative to advance Maine's commitment to regionalism," stated State Representative Chris Barstow (D-Gorham), sponsor of the legislation.

Regional Water Councils would undertake joint planning and set local industry standards that would facilitate the integration of water systems and sources. The recent drought, which left many water utilities with critically low water supplies, has highlighted a crucial need for developing a broader approach to water resource planning. And as a result of 9/11, most water utilities have gone through extensive emergency planning which has underscored the need for backup systems and supplies.

"Our District is in favor of this bill because it allows utilities to maintain local control and at the same time take advantage of the benefits a regional provider would have," stated Michael Nadeau, Superintendent of the South Berwick Water District.

For over a year, seven southern Maine water utilities (*Biddeford-Saco Water Company, Kennebunk-Kennebunkport-Wells Water District, Kittery Water District, Portland Water District, Sanford Water District, South Berwick Water District, and York Water District*) have been examining ways to reduce costs and improve contingency plans for providing water services. As a result, the group is supporting legislation to allow for the creation of Regional Water Councils. Representative Barstow is sponsoring the bill and will bring it forward in the 122nd Legislative session. Combined, these seven utilities serve 23 communities, roughly 375,000 people.

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