



October 22, 2021

Honorable Katherine Umberger, Chairwoman  
House Finance Committee  
Legislative Office Building, Room 210-211  
Concord, NH 03301 (via electronic delivery only)

Subject: Please Support House Bills HB 398, HB412, and 536

Dear Chairwoman Umberger and Finance Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of the NH Water Works Association (NHWWA) and our 300+ members who represent the roughly 2,500 regulated public drinking water suppliers that serve more than half of New Hampshire's residents with safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water. Many of our members also operate wastewater treatment facilities, which is why funding for water infrastructure requires a broad perspective and understanding of this essential public service.

The NHWWA enthusiastically supports House Bills HB 398, HB 412, and HB 536, and urges you to support them, too. Each Bill helps to ensure that our drinking water, wastewater, and the professionals that ensure uninterrupted service can continue to operate at safe, sustainable, and affordable levels. Summaries of each Bill and our reasons for supporting them follow:

### **HB398 and HB412**

HB398 and HB412 appropriate funds via State Aid Grants (SAG) for important State-approved water and wastewater projects not currently funded through other sources. The SAG programs are a legal promise made under RSA 486 to help towns with infrastructure investments. Investments in public water resources are not optional – our health and economic wellbeing rely on them.

- HB398 would appropriate funds for 11 “forgotten” wastewater treatment projects, plus 110 new projects identified by NHDES as complete and eligible for SAG funding over the current biennium. The 11 forgotten projects were slated to receive SAG funding in the previous biennium until funding was suspended due to revenue uncertainty during the COVID pandemic. State revenues have since exceeded original projections.

Cities and towns completed these 11 important yet forgotten projects trusting that the State would uphold its funding commitments under RSA 486. *Note that municipalities cannot use ARPA funds for water and sewer projects completed prior to March 3, 2021.*

- HB412 appropriates \$500,000 / year for the biennium to assist towns with planning efforts to maximize the benefits of incoming federal funds. The federal funds are expected to



greatly increase the State Revolving Loan Fund (SRF) and other municipal assistance programs, creating a generational opportunity to catch up on decades of deferred maintenance. Many of our communities lack the personnel and expertise to identify critical infrastructure needs and solutions. This proposed use of these funds for planning will provide substantial positive results.

### **HB 536**

When the COVID vaccines first arrived in New Hampshire, water workers were not prioritized to receive shots. We feel this condition created an unacceptable societal risk, for without water and sewer services, fire, police, and health-care providers are unable to do their jobs.

During the 2019 – 2020 legislative session HB 1494 (Employee Labor Rights Bill) was passed by the House and Senate. It extended the death benefit payment from Police/Fire/EMS to public workers that were killed in the line of duty. The Final Bill had some amendments that Gov. Sununu could not accept so he vetoed the Bill.

On October 20, 2021, HB 1494 was reintroduced as HB 536 by partisan (9 to 0 Democratic) vote. We fully support the intentions of HB 536 and look forward to creating enabling legislation that recognizes water workers and enables them to continue providing critical services during future emergencies.

Finally, it is important to know that public water is provided by municipalities, precincts, districts, and private utilities. Regardless of the corporate structure, all public water providers should be included when considering and crafting effective legislation.

The NHWWA proudly serves New Hampshire's water providers and consumers by providing useful information and insight for sound policy and governance decisions. We welcome your questions about how public drinking water is delivered to 54% of our resident population, and actions we can take together to ensure safe, affordable, and sustainable drinking water for generations to come.

Thank you for considering our recommendation to support House Bills HB 398, HB 412, and HB 536.

Sincerely,

**Boyd Smith**

President and CEO

[BSmith@NHWWA.org](mailto:BSmith@NHWWA.org)