



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Elaine Phillips

## Senator Phillips Joins Colleagues To Call On Cuomo Administration To Stop Delaying And Fast-Track New Drinking Water Safeguards

ELAINE PHILLIPS September 24, 2018



Senator Elaine Phillips joined Senators Kemp Hannon, and Carl Marcellino today to demand that Governor Cuomo and the state departments of Health and Environmental Conservation take immediate steps necessary to protect New York's drinking water from potentially harmful chemicals. The Senators released a four-part action plan to restart the stalled process required to set state standards for 1,4-dioxane, PFOA, and PFOS, ensure local governments have access to the funds needed to remove drinking water contaminants, and

improve public notification about emerging health threats.

Senator Phillips, Chair of the Senate's Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee, said, "Long Island's drinking water supply is unique from the rest of the state and the three million residents of Nassau and Suffolk Counties depend entirely on a sole source aquifer for the hundreds of millions of gallons of water used daily. State contaminant standards must be set without further delay to allow communities access to funding which my colleagues and I secured supporting clean water infrastructure. The Governor needs to put Long Island first and take immediate action to protect this sole source water supply from possible carcinogenic contaminants and ensure the health and safety of current residents and future generations."

The Senators called upon the Cuomo administration to take four necessary steps that will help communities on Long Island and throughout the state protect their water quality and prevent contaminants from affecting public health:

1. Hold Drinking Water Quality Council Meetings

The Drinking Water Quality Council was created by the Senate and included as part of the 2017-18 state budget to make recommendations to the Department of Health ensuring the safety of potable water. It is one of the actions taken following investigations in several Long Island communities, Hoosick Falls and Petersburg in Rensselaer County, Newburgh in Orange County, and other municipalities across the state where the potentially harmful chemicals 1,4-dioxane, PFOA, and PFOS were detected in drinking water supplies.

While three meetings were held shortly after Council members were appointed in September 2017, a March 2018 meeting was cancelled and still has not been rescheduled. No other meetings have taken place over the past seven months and recommendations on safety

thresholds are due early this October.

## 2. Set New Recommended Levels for Drinking Water Safety

New York State needs to establish state standards to protect the public from emerging contaminants because the federal government has not yet done so. Despite an announcement from Governor Cuomo in February 2017 touting the importance of setting a drinking water standard for 1,4-dioxane, and outreach from the Senators urging DOH and DEC to quickly adopt state safeguards, the state has still not acted 18 months later.

## 3. Support Infrastructure Investment to Prevent Water Contamination

As part of the 2017-18 state budget, the Senate successfully secured a historic \$2.5 billion investment in funding to support clean water infrastructure. Projects that would protect water supplies from 1,4-dioxane, PFOA, and PFOS are eligible to compete for this funding. However, given the absence of any specific state standards for these contaminants, water districts may be unaware that they need to remediate and may be at a disadvantage in the application scoring process until new standards are established.

## 4. Sign a Senate Bill Improving Public Awareness of Dangerous Contaminants

Earlier this year, both houses of the Legislature passed a bill (S6655) to improve public awareness of harmful contaminants in the environment. It requires DOH to post information on its website about emerging contaminant notifications levels and create educational materials so that the information is easily accessible to residents and public water system managers. Currently, finding such information can be difficult and this bill would make it easier to find these important details with an accessible link on the Department's website and other public information materials. The Governor has not yet acted on the bill to make it law.

In recent months, Senator Hannon, Senator Phillips, more than a dozen environmental, civic and research groups, and many others have urged the state to reconvene the council, issue recommendations, and set protective standards. Research on the presence of emerging contaminants like 1,4-dioxane in drinking water continues, including a recent report by Citizen's Campaign for the Environment which found it in dozens of well locations on Long Island alone.

Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment, said, "The science is clear, the problem is intensifying; immediate action for drinking water standards for these contaminants is a matter of urgency. Every week we delay puts the public at risk. In CCE's own independent testing, 23 out of 30 common household products contained 1,4 dioxane, which contributes to the drinking water problem."

The Senate has been leading the charge to address drinking water quality by reaching out to impacted communities, providing significant resources, and implementing legislative initiatives that protect public health and the environment. Hearings led by Senators O'Mara and Hannon held in 2016 led to an extensive report on Water Quality and Contamination in early 2017, followed by the adoption of a state budget with the largest single investment in clean water infrastructure in the state's history. Senate measures committing additional support to help Hoosick Falls address a legacy of contamination in that community became law, and a bill to help protect the Petersburg water supply are among other measures that the Senate will continue to pursue to protect public health and the environment.