



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michelle Hinchey

## Senator Hinchey Holds Bipartisan Legislative Forum Focused on Clean Water Infrastructure Funding Reform

MICHELLE HINCHEY December 13, 2021

| ISSUE: **CLEAN WATER**



**ALBANY, NY** – On Friday, December 10, State Senator Michelle Hinchey held a fact-finding legislative forum focused on examining the challenges plaguing New York’s drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure. Hinchey brought representatives from local government, labor, environmental and conservation groups, and professional associations to Albany to testify before a panel of state senators with the goal of identifying long-term solutions to help communities across New York State rebuild and revitalize their clean water

systems. Hinchey will use stakeholder testimony to draft a Senate report detailing the foremost issues identified along with feasible solutions to inform future legislative, regulatory, and state budget action moving forward.

The bipartisan group of state senators present at Hinchey's forum included Senator James Gaughran (D), Senator Rachel May (D), Senator Pete Harckham (D), Senator Shelley Mayer (D), Senator George Borello (R), Senator Daphne Jordan (R), and Senator James Tedisco (R).

**[A recording of Hinchey's clean water legislative forum can be viewed here.](#)**

"Access to clean water is a fundamental right, but, in communities across New York State, that access is under constant threat by aging, and, in many cases, decaying 100+-year-old infrastructure due to decades of underinvestment," **said Senator Michelle Hinchey.** "The state of New York's water infrastructure has led to severe illness, furthered the climate crisis, increased the cost of living, and hurled many local governments into debt. Our communities cannot endure another decade of underinvestment in our water systems, and it's incumbent upon us to deliver real, meaningful progress to address these detrimental and often avoidable problems. Our Legislative Forum was a needed first step to formally identify the challenges in upgrading and maintaining our water lines so that we can ensure a future system that works for everyone. I look forward to working with my colleagues to enact some of the solutions we heard at our forum so that we can guarantee clean water for everyone in New York State."

Riverkeeper, a non-profit environmental organization, estimates that due to decades of underinvestment in New York's clean water systems, the 46th Senate District, which Hinchey represents, requires nearly \$80 million for water repairs and the Hudson Valley \$941

million. The organization maintains that both are conservative estimates not inclusive of the millions more in unknown needs.

**Forum stakeholders highlighted the following needs to improve New York’s water systems:**

- Earmark investment for small private water companies and strengthen oversight
- Develop a streamlined funding source for municipalities to apply for water projects
- Institute “dig once” principles to coordinate roadway projects with water installations
- Provide technical support to help municipalities navigate the grant writing process
- Allocate state aid and grant opportunities for local health departments to hire qualified staff to monitor public drinking water systems
- Reduce the emissions of overflowing wastewater, which leads to powerful greenhouse gas emissions — a study by Cornell University and Riverkeeper found that in NYC alone, overflowing wastewater caused by extreme rain events produced the emissions of around 41,000 cars

During the forum, stakeholders voiced support for a number of legislative initiatives undertaken by Hinchey, including the **Safe Water Infrastructure Action Program (S.3968-A)**, which would provide municipalities with a steady funding stream through the annual State Budget to plan for and finance water system replacements and repairs as well as Hinchey’s bill to **Institute Dig Once Principles for Water Projects (S.6041)**, which would ensure alignment between roadway projects, water installations, and other public works.

The panelists who contributed to the forum are below.

**Panel 1: Government Organizations**

- **Barbara Van Epps** - Deputy Executive Director, New York Conference of Mayors
- **Ryan Gregoire** - Legislative Director, NYS Association of Counties
- **Sarah Ravenhall** - Executive Director, NYS Association of County Health Officials
- **Richard Elder** - Director, NYS Conference of Environmental Health Directors
- **Richard Berkley, Esq.** - Executive Director, NYS Public Utility Law Project

#### Panel 2: Local Government Officials

- **Mayor Amy Serrago** - Village of Athens
- **Supervisor Jeff Ruso** - Town of New Baltimore
- **Supervisor Melinda McKnight** - Town of Hurley
- **Mayor Michael Cinquanti** - City of Amsterdam

#### Panel 3: Environmental Organizations

- **Reyna Cohen** - State Policy Associate, New York League of Conservation Voters
- **Robert Hayes** - Director of Clean Water, Environmental Advocates NY
- **David Miller** - Clean Water Program Coordinator, Adirondack Council
- **Brian Smith** - Associate Executive Director, Citizens Campaign for the Environment
- **Jeremy Cherson** - Senior Manager of Government Affairs, Riverkeeper
- **Jessica Ottney Mahar** - NY Policy and Strategy Director, The Nature Conservancy

#### Panel 4: Industry & Labor Groups

- **Daniel Ortega** - Community Affairs Director, Local 825 Operating Engineers
- **Martin Aman** - Representing New York Section American Water Works Association
- **Timothy Murphy** - Representing New York Water Environment Association, Inc.
- **Martin Daley** - Director of Water Quality Programs, Capital District Regional Planning Commission.

*Senator Michelle Hinchey represents the 46th Senate District, which includes Greene and Montgomery Counties and parts of Albany, Schenectady, and Ulster Counties. Senator Hinchey serves as Chair of the Agriculture Committee and sits on the Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, Commerce, Economic Development and Small Business, Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks and Recreation, Energy and Telecommunications, Environmental Conservation, and Local Government Committees.*

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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## 2021-S6041

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- Introduced
- - In Committee Assembly
  - In Committee Senate
- - On Floor Calendar Assembly
  - On Floor Calendar Senate

- ◦ Passed Assembly
  - Passed Senate
- Delivered to Governor
- Signed By Governor
- 

Requires highway projects that receive state funding to include the assessment and repair of water infrastructure and provides for access to such water infrastructure

March 31, 2021

In Senate Committee **Transportation**

Sponsored by **Michelle Hinchey**

Do you support this bill?

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## **2021-S3968A**

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- Introduced
- ◦ In Committee Assembly
  - In Committee Senate
- ◦ On Floor Calendar Assembly
  - On Floor Calendar Senate

- - Passed Assembly
  - Passed Senate
- Delivered to Governor
- Signed By Governor
- 

Relates to establishing the safe water infrastructure action program

February 01, 2021

In Senate Committee [Environmental Conservation](#)

Sponsored by [Michelle Hinchey](#)

Do you support this bill?