American Backflow Prevention Association

To: HouseEnvironmentandNaturalResources@rilegislature.gov

Honorable Chair Bennett and Members of the House Committee on Environmental and Natural Resources

RE: H7918 – Position: Oppose

My name is Michael Hebert, and I respectfully submit this written testimony in opposition to H7918, which proposes limiting inspection and certification of backflow prevention assemblies from annually to once every ten years.

It has come to my attention that legislation is being proposed to change Rhode Island State Law governing the frequency of backflow assembly testing — from annually to once every ten years, with exceptions only in cases of emergency or public health crisis. I write to express my strong opposition to this proposal and to urge you to preserve the current annual testing requirement.

Backflow prevention assemblies are mechanical systems. Like all mechanical equipment, they are subject to wear, corrosion, and failure over time. Annual testing is not an arbitrary regulatory burden — it is a scientifically sound, industry-standard practice recommended by device manufacturers and required by the Plumbing Code for good reason. Reducing the testing interval to ten years would leave Rhode Island residents exposed to a very real and preventable risk: a failed backflow assembly could go undetected for years, allowing contaminated water to back-flow into the public water distribution system. The proposed exception for emergencies and public health situations misses the point entirely. The purpose of annual testing is precisely to prevent those situations from occurring in the first place. By the time a backflow failure triggers a public health emergency, the damage to public safety — and public trust — will already be done.

It is also important to remember who bears responsibility when a failure occurs. If this law is weakened and a contamination event results, the question of accountability — whether it falls on the property owner, the business owner, or the legislators who changed the standard — will be difficult to answer and even more difficult to accept.

The current annual testing requirement was not established carelessly. The Rhode Island Department of Health, the Rhode Island Backflow Association, Water Districts, and the plumbing community worked collaboratively to establish this standard in law, specifically to protect the health and safety of Rhode Island's public water system. That consensus represents years of professional expertise and a shared commitment to public health.

I respectfully urge you to reject this proposed change and to stand firmly behind the protections that have been carefully put in place. The health of Rhode Island's residents and the integrity of its public water supply depend on it. I have also enclosed Position statements

Respectfully,

Michael Hebert

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AMERICAN BACKFLOW PREVENTION ASSOCIATION

Position Statement Concerning

FIELD TESTING OF BACKFLOW PREVENTION ASSEMBLIES

In pursuit of the stated goals of the American Backflow Prevention Association (ABPA) of protecting the quality and integrity of safe drinking water, the Board of Directors believes that a Position Statement regarding "Field Testing of Backflow Prevention Assemblies" is essential.

Backflow prevention assemblies are installed for protection from an actual or potential cross-connection. Any mechanical piece of equipment such as a backflow preventer is subject to failure due to wear from usage. The ABPA supports regular field testing and maintenance of backflow prevention assemblies to ensure their proper operation and to protect the potable water supply. The actual frequency of field testing of each assembly must be determined by the local jurisdiction having authority. However, the ABPA concurs with the various manufacturers' recommended practice of field testing all backflow prevention assemblies after initial installation, upon relocation, after repairs of any kind are made to the assembly, and at least once annually thereafter. This is also consistent with the prevailing Building and Plumbing Codes used in the United States and Canada. The ABPA advocates using test equipment and field test procedures that will accurately determine the working condition of the backflow prevention assembly.

Therefore, in order to ensure the continued proper operation of all backflow prevention assemblies, it is the position of the ABPA that they be tested by individuals properly trained and certified, and with the appropriate equipment using ABPA-adopted field test procedures, or those procedures accepted or required by the authority having jurisdiction.

Approved by the ABPA Board of Directors: May 9, 2004 – Long Beach, California
Reapproved: May 18, 2010 – New Orleans, Louisiana
Amended and Reapproved: May 16, 2015 – Nashville, Tennessee
Amended and Reapproved: May 3, 2025 – Little Rock, Arkansas

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Backflow Prevention Industry Position Paper:

Backflow Prevention Methods and Frequency of Testing

January 1, 2015

This position paper is presented as a united effort with the organizations listed below to enhance the safety of the drinking water and quality of cross connection control and backflow prevention programs throughout the world. We, the undersigned believe proper backflow prevention methods and field-testing are critical components of effective cross connection control programs. To further this goal we endorse and recommend the following as best industry practices for backflow prevention methods and frequency of testing.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS:

American Backflow Prevention Association (ABPA), ASSE International (ASSE), International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO), IAPMO Backflow Prevention Institute (IAPMO BPI) and Backflow Prevention Manufacturers Association (BPMA).

COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL APPLICATIONS:

It is universally accepted that backflow protection is required for commercial applications that pose a hazard to the public water supply. A common misconception is that residential applications do not pose this same hazard. Hydraulically water acts and reacts identically in commercial and residential applications.

Residential irrigation systems have the same inherent dangers (i.e. fertilizer, pesticide, animal feces, etc.) as a commercial irrigation system and should maintain similar levels of backflow protection. Irrigation sprinkler systems for residential applications and for commercial application is the same basic piping, valves, and outlets. The installation of approved, code specified, backflow prevention commensurate with the degree of hazard remains the same for both commercial and residential applications.

SYSTEM MAINTENANCE AND TESTING IS CRUCIAL IN MAINTAINING PUBLIC HEALTH SAFETY:

All mechanical devices are subject to failure due to age, wear, damage, accidents, and corrosion. The associations listed in this position paper support regular field-testing and maintenance of backflow prevention assemblies to ensure their proper operation thereby protecting public health and the water supply. As with any mechanical device, regular maintenance and testing will extend the life of the assembly and help prevent unnecessary replacement. The listed associations concur with various manufacturers' recommended practice of field-testing all backflow prevention assemblies upon installation, after repairs, and annually thereafter. This practice is consistent with the adopted Building and Plumbing Codes used in the United States and Canada.

Historically, backflow prevention was in response to illness from waterborne contaminants. The reduction of documented backflow incidents is evidence that the cross connection control programs are effective. Reducing the requirements for cross connection control programs is the equivalent of removing a traffic signal from a busy intersection because there are no longer traffic accidents.

USC University of Southern California

Foundation for Cross-Connection Control and Hydraulic Research

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Recommended Annual Field Testing for Backflow Prevention Assemblies

The USC Foundation recommends annual field testing for all backflow prevention assemblies.

Field testing backflow prevention assemblies ensures they are functioning correctly. Assemblies are subject to failure, like any mechanical device. Field testing the assemblies on a scheduled basis becomes critical for safe drinking water, since all assemblies are installed to protect the public from pollutants or contaminants.

The standard practice of care in the cross-connection control and backflow prevention industry is to field test backflow prevention assemblies annually. The USC Foundation's *Manual of Cross-Connection Control, Tenth Edition*, recommends annual field testing. This recommendation is supported by the Water Research Foundation (AWWARF) report 90928F, entitled "*Impacts of Cross-Connections in North American Water Supplies*," which states that 94% of water suppliers require field tests annually or more frequently.

The USC Foundation's annual testing recommendation originates from its Approval Program for backflow prevention assemblies. As part of the program, all assemblies that pass the laboratory evaluation must also complete a one-year field evaluation. Therefore, the Foundation recommends annual field testing for assemblies. Field testing ensures installed assemblies operate correctly, protecting public health by safeguarding the drinking water.

For any questions about the recommendation for annual field testing of backflow prevention assemblies please contact the Foundation office.