

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to House Bill 5511, introduced by Alex Finkleman, which would grant Jamestown Board of Water & Sewer an exemption from a standard established by state law applicable to all water suppliers. This amendment would undermine the current statewide law that ensures water rights are applied consistently and fairly across Rhode Island. Standardizing water access at the state level is crucial to preventing arbitrary decision-making and ensuring that all residents are treated equitably. It is for this reason that this body, in 2022, passed these statewide standards. This current standard, passed by this General Assembly in 2022 in a 58-2 vote in the house, and 38-0 vote in the Senate, establishes a very high burden for an applicant to meet to extend water service---that the drilling of another well is not feasible, and it requires, among other things, that the applicant foot the entire bill for such extension, avoiding the forcing of a financial burden to the town. Additionally, it already recognizes that a water supplier may prohibit extensions in its water supply plan (WSSMP) submitted to the state. Jamestown has chosen *not* to prohibit extensions in their WSSMP, therefor not exempting them from this very important law.

Water is a fundamental human necessity, and access to it should not be left to the discretion of local boards with shifting priorities. The existing statewide law sets clear, uniform standards for water access, ensuring that every applicant is evaluated under the same criteria, regardless of where they live. If this bill were to pass, it would create a dangerous precedent, allowing municipalities to selectively decide who received water service and who does not. This could lead to continued favoritism, discrimination, and inconsistent policies that ultimately harm residents.

The town of Jamestown has claimed that there is a water shortage, but just last week, it was announced in the Town Council meeting, that the town has applied for a \$50,000 bond to extend the water main down to Fort Getty's brand new sailing school. Let me note that Fort Getty and the new sailing school are *not currently part of the water district*. If our reservoir were truly under the stress of depletion, the town would be opting for alternative solutions, such as installing cisterns, digging a well at Fort Getty, or even implementing a small reverse osmosis system to provide water to the sailing school. Instead, the town is prioritizing extending municipal water — what they claim is a “finite resource” — to a sailing school that does not pay any rent to the town, so that they can wash boats, while taxpaying residents are being denied access to water for basic necessities like brushing their teeth. The 2022 state law was put in place for the residents who truly have NO OTHER OPTIONS... The town wants to push this bill through in order to maintain the power to deny these residents of their last feasible option, when they are approving water extensions to a sailing school outside of the water district. If the water supply is stable enough to extend service for this purpose, then it is stable enough to provide for the needs of existing residents to be able to continue to live in their homes.

Furthermore, testimony from the Director of Public Works last summer indicated that water usage was down 700,000 gallons per day in 2024 compared to 2023. If the town is using significantly less water than in prior years and needs more users to help balance costs, restricting access to new users is both illogical and harmful to the financial sustainability of Jamestown's water system.

This bill would give the town excessive control over an essential resource, allowing just five members of the community, four of which are on the municipal water system (this seems like a conflict of interest, to me), to make arbitrary decisions that could negatively impact taxpaying residents. ***The moral and ethical question here is simple: how can a municipality deny residents access to water, a basic necessity for life, while simultaneously expanding water service for non-essential uses? The current statewide law ensures that water rights are applied fairly and prevents local authorities from making decisions based on subjective criteria. That standardization is vital, and it must be preserved.***

I urge you to **reject** H-5511 and protect the integrity of Rhode Island's statewide water access laws. Fair and standardized policies are the best way to ensure that all residents have reliable access to this essential resource.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Christina DiMeglio
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