

Portsmouth Water and Fire District



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RE: S2803 – Position: Oppose

Written Testimony in Opposition to S2803

Jessica Lynch, P.E.

General Manager & Chief Engineer

Portsmouth Water and Fire District

I respectfully submit this written testimony in strong opposition to S2803, which proposes to change the required inspection and certification frequency of backflow prevention assemblies from annually to once every ten years. It has come to my attention that this legislation seeks to amend Rhode Island State Law governing backflow assembly testing, significantly reducing the frequency of required inspections, with exceptions only in cases of emergency or public health crisis. I urge you to preserve the current annual testing requirement as written.

The existing Backflow Law, enacted on June 27, 2007, was established to protect public water distribution systems. Backflow prevention assemblies are mechanical devices, and like all mechanical systems, they are subject to wear, corrosion, and eventual failure. Annual testing is not an arbitrary regulatory burden—it is a scientifically supported, industry-standard practice recommended by manufacturers and required under plumbing codes for good reason. The current law specifically requires testing of containment backflow assemblies located downstream of the water meter, which serve as a critical safeguard for the public water distribution system. Reducing the testing interval to ten years would expose Rhode Island residents to a serious and preventable risk. A failed backflow assembly could go undetected for years, allowing contaminated water to flow backward into the public system.

The proposed exception for emergencies and public health situations fundamentally misses the purpose of routine testing. Annual inspections are intended to prevent such emergencies—not respond to them after the fact. In the event of a contamination incident, identifying the source of failure would be extremely difficult. The process of locating and testing backflow assemblies across a system would be time-consuming and resource-intensive, all while public health remains at risk and public confidence deteriorates. By the time an issue rises to the level of a public health emergency, the damage will already have been done.

It is also critical to consider accountability. If this law is weakened and a contamination event occurs, determining responsibility—whether it lies with property owners, business owners, or the legislators who approved the change—will be both complex and contentious.

The current annual testing requirement was established through collaboration among the Rhode Island Department of Health, the Rhode Island Backflow Association, water districts, and the plumbing community. This consensus reflects years of technical expertise and a shared commitment to safeguarding public health and the integrity of Rhode Island's water systems.

I respectfully urge you to reject S2803 and uphold the existing annual testing requirement. The health and safety of Rhode Island residents—and the protection of our public water supply—depend on maintaining these proven standards.

Respectfully,

Jessica Lynch, PE

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