

Testimony of

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Before the

Assembly Minority Task Force on Water Quality

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Assemblyman Stec, Assemblyman LiPetri, Assemblywoman Walsh and members of the task force, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Tom O'Connor, Vice President, Government Relations for the Capital Region Chamber.

The Capital Region Chamber represents over 2,400 businesses and organizations from throughout the region that employ more than 150,000 area residents. Our Chamber's membership is diverse. We represent for-profits and not-for-profits; large corporations and small family-owned businesses.

Water quality is important to the Capital Region's economic future. The Chamber is particularly concerned regarding our region's aging water and sewer infrastructure. We encourage the state to make the necessary investments in this infrastructure in order to ensure its reliability and stability.

Specifically, the Chamber fully supports legislation which has been introduced by Senator Tedisco and Assemblyman Steck. This bill would amend the Environmental Conservation Law to implement a companion program to the existing Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPs), called the Safe Water Infrastructure Action Program (SWAP), which would offer assistance to local governments for drinking water, sanitary sewer and storm water infrastructure.

Failures of our aging water and sewer infrastructure seem to be a near daily occurrence. It is all too common for one of our cities, towns or villages to be dealing with a broken water main or a storm water sewer that has been stretched well beyond its capacity. Many of our region's water and sewer infrastructure are over 100 years old. As these systems age, we will experience an ever-increasing number of these failures.

An aging infrastructure is not only costly to our localities and a threat to public safety, it is also an impediment to their fiscal health. Communities facing severe fiscal constraints cannot absorb the financial burden of the frequent and

disruptive breaks associated with an aged and deteriorating water and sewer infrastructure.

Our region's water and sewer infrastructure are an important asset for all businesses and residents. Without the proper investment, our economic stability, potential for job growth and competitiveness are threatened. As a state, we must provide our local governments with a reliable and consistent funding source to maintain these vital systems.

The Capital Region Chamber strongly supports investment in our aging water and sewer infrastructure and therefore recommends the passage of this legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with the Capital Region Chamber's perspective on this important issue.