

HD.1635 An Act relative to maintaining adequate water supplies through effective drought management

Sponsored by Senator Jamie Eldridge and Representative Carolyn Dykema

Summer 2016 and 2020: Many rivers throughout Massachusetts experienced record low flows, and portions of some major rivers, such as the Ipswich and Parker, went dry. Several municipal water sources became depleted, posing a challenge for water suppliers.

With climate change scientists predicting increases in both short-term floods *and* droughts in Massachusetts, we must be prepared for both extremes.

An important goal of drought resilience is to sustain streamflow, groundwater levels, and water supplies for as long as possible when precipitation is scarce. **The most effective, immediate, and least costly way to achieve this is to conserve water during a drought.**



THE PROBLEM

- **Massachusetts lacks authority to require water conservation during a drought.** Despite the severity of the drought of 2016, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary could *recommend* outdoor watering restrictions but could not require them.
- **Streams across the state dried up in 2020**, like Stony Brook in Chelmsford, Buttonwood Brook in Dartmouth, Deer Brook in Northampton, Churchill Brook in Pittsfield, and Jacksaw Brook in Westborough.
- Massachusetts farmers sustained **economic losses of \$18M** during the 2016 drought due to crop failures, including damage to our iconic cranberry bogs.
- Local boards of health reported **private well failures from 220 private residences** during the 2016 drought and there were **six public water supply emergency declarations**.

THE SOLUTION

This bill would give the Commonwealth the authority to restrict non-essential outdoor watering during droughts, ensuring that our water supply can sustain public health and our environment.

- Nonessential outdoor water use restrictions would gradually escalate as drought levels worsen, as detailed in the State's 2019 Drought Management Plan.
- These restrictions would apply to all water users within a drought region.
- Agricultural water users would be exempted.

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