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SMITH-GORDON-WHELAN-GREENSTEIN CLEAN WATER BILL PACKAGE **APPROVED BY ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

Legislation Would Help Municipalities to Upgrade Water Treatment Systems in Preparation for Future Natural Disasters

TRENTON – The Senate Environment Committee today approved a package of bills to upgrade water systems in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy and to help local communities throughout the state finance infrastructure projects to improve water quality and deliver safer drinking water to residents.

The first bill, S-2815, sponsored by Senator Bob Smith, would provide short-term funding for environmental infrastructure projects to repair damage incurred during Hurricane Sandy or to mitigate risk of damage from future storms.

“Hurricane Sandy showed the weaknesses in our state’s water treatment operations. These failures caused hundred of millions of gallons of raw sewage to be dumped into our waterways and left residents throughout the state with water that was unsafe to consume,” said Senator Smith, S-Middlesex and Somerset, Chairman of the Committee. “Over the coming years, a significant investment must be made to ensure that when the next big storm hits, New Jersey families’ water supply is not compromised.”

The bill creates a Disaster Relief Emergency Financing Program within the Environmental Infrastructure Trust (EIT). The bill would allow the EIT to incur up to \$5 billion in debt to provide short-term and temporary bridge loans to local governments to finance wastewater treatment system or water supply projects that have either been damaged due to Hurricane Sandy or could be at risk of damage from a future emergency.

The Disaster Relief Emergency Financing Program would be funded initially through federal relief funds or lines of credit. The loans made under the program would be repaid when the borrower is reimbursed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for the cost of the project.

According to the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Hurricane Sandy caused more than \$2.6 billion worth of damage to the state’s water infrastructure. The DEP also suggested that the state will need to make an investment of an additional \$45 billion over the next twenty years in order to modernize our current wastewater treatment and drinking water infrastructure.

The Committee approved three additional bills today that would work to repair water infrastructure by financing projects through the EIT and the DEP. S-2816, sponsored by Senator Bob Gordon, and S-2817, sponsored by Senator Whelan, would authorize a joint venture between the EIT and the DEP to expend up to \$780.3 million to provide low-interest loans for a portion of 165 eligible environmental infrastructure projects. SCR-158, sponsored by Senator Linda R. Greenstein, would approve the plan.

“New Jersey’s water infrastructure is completely out of date with some communities’ water and sewer systems being more than 100 years old,” said Senator Gordon, D-Bergen and Passaic. “By providing low interest loans to our communities, taxpayer money is saved, and the end result is safer and cleaner water for New Jersey’s families.”

“When Hurricane Sandy hit our Shore, the vulnerabilities of our state’s water sewage and water treatment facilities became apparent, causing damage to more than 100 facilities,” said Senator Whelan, D-Atlantic. “Serious investment in our wastewater treatment and water supply facilities is

vital to protecting the public health by ensuring that wastewater is not deposited into our waterways and untreated drinking water is not delivered to our home taps.”

Since its inception in 1985, the EIT in partnership with the DEP has invested \$5.97 billion in upgrading treatment facilities, a record that has created more than 110,000 construction jobs throughout the state.

“By investing nearly \$800 million in our state’s water infrastructure over the next year, we can put New Jersey men and women back to work, spurring economic revitalization,” said Senator Greenstein, D-Middlesex and Mercer. “This program is a win for all parties involved, the construction industry will see job growth, communities will be able to repair its aging infrastructure and residents will be ensured clean drinking water.”

The bills were all unanimously approved in Committee.