

Senate Measure To Prevent The Christie Administration From Weakening Water Quality Regulations Advances

Lesniak, Smith, Greenstein Resolution Would Reverse DEP's Proposed Changes To The Flood Hazard Area Control Act

Trenton – A Senate resolution sponsored by Senator Raymond Lesniak, Senator Bob Smith and Senator Linda Greenstein that would prevent the Christie Administration from weakening water quality regulations with rules that would expose New Jersey's waterways to more contaminants, threaten fish habitats and increase the risk of flooding gained approval by the Senate today. The concurrent resolution, SCR-180, would reverse the changes the state Department of Environmental Protection wants to make to the Flood Hazard Area Control Act.

"The Christie Administration's proposed regulations to permit development in close proximity to protected streams and waterways will increase flooding in dozens of communities throughout the state and degrade water quality," said Senator Lesniak. "The proposed regulations will have a greater impact on the quality of life of New Jersey residents than the governor's settlement with ExxonMobil. They are that bad."

"The proposed rules appear to reverse the stewardship of former environmental commissioners Brad Campbell and Lisa Jackson, who both worked to preserve New Jersey's streams and water supply," said Senator Smith, the chair of the Senate Environment and Energy Committee. "This would be a step backwards in the effort to protect natural resources."

"More than a dozen environmental groups in this state from the Highlands to the Jersey Shore testified before our committee and they are of one voice in opposition to this attempted rollback of critical environmental protections," said Senator Greenstein, a co-prime sponsor and vice chair of the Senate Environment and Energy Committee. "We cannot stand idly by as this administration attempts to erode our last line of defense against the ravages of climate change and assaults on clean drinking water." Majority votes in both houses of the Legislature could force the DEP to withdraw the proposed rule changes. A similar resolution will be introduced in the Assembly at its next session, Senator Lesniak said. The rule changes would weaken stream buffer requirements which help maintain the natural, vegetative buffers protecting waterways from pollutants and people from flooding, Senator Lesniak said. And, in a state that has seen 22 major floods in recent years, we can't allow irresponsible actions that increase the threat of destructive flooding, Senator Lesniak said.

The proposed administrative rule changes were issued June 1, 2015. The resolution, once approved, would give DEP 30 days to withdraw or revise the proposals. If the administration fails to respond appropriately, the Legislature can pass another concurrent resolution to completely invalidate the regulations, in whole or in part.

The resolution was approved with a vote of 26 to 12.