



March 12, 2024

RE: Opposition to House Bill 1146

Chairman and members of the Senate Natural Resources and Environment Committee:

As the Executive Director of the Georgia Association of Water Professionals, this is to express opposition to HB 1146. We are a statewide organization of water professionals that includes public and private sector providers of water, wastewater, and stormwater management services. Our role is to provide education and training to the thousands of water professionals in Georgia, and to be a resource for those interested in responsibly managing Georgia water resources. We were established in 1932, have 4,000 individual members and over 250 water utilities and corporate members. We have been a respected technical resource regarding water and utility operations in Georgia for over 90 years.

HB 1146 does not support responsible water resources management and contradicts state water policy. In particular, the bill circumvents protections in the Rules of Safe Drinking Water (Georgia R&R 391-3-5) that are necessary to protect consumers and communities. Section .04 of the Rules outlines the approvals required for establishing water systems that serve the public. Each of the 11 paragraphs in this section of the Safe Drinking Water rules reflects approvals and procedures that support responsible water management, including local government coordination and approval and certified concurrence of privately-owned community water systems operating in their jurisdictions. There is a lot of wisdom in these rules, unfortunately gained from bad experiences between public and private entities in Georgia. Without coordination, concurrence and mutual support between the local jurisdiction and the private entity, the chances for this forced "arrangement" to go well are slim. This bill does not offer a win-win. It is a win-lose and puts EPD, local governments, and water customers in a precarious position.

I understand that this bill is being offered as a solution to an immediate water need to serve the Hyundai project and development of workforce housing. This is an amazing economic development offering lots and lots of opportunities for Georgians. However, I urge caution when it comes to the impact on water resources in this region, and the rush to push aside sound water policy and the authority of the local governments in this area. This bill will benefit a private water supplier, at the expense of an existing and effective water policy that works everywhere in the State. While the bill has been explained to me to be limited in geographic scope, as it is currently written, it could affect the entire groundwater zone south of the Fall Line, not just the coast nor the area near the Hyundai project. Further, the precedent it sets to bypass approvals that protect the environment and consumers can set up a troubling situation for other Georgia communities.

We've learned many tough lessons during the decades of rapid growth in Georgia; the policies and procedures in the Safe Drinking Water Rules are in place to assure the public that known mistakes won't be repeated. I want to stress how important it is to avoid the problems and costs that arise when water services are not collaborative and cooperative between public and private entities. Between the Safe Drinking Water Rules and the State's Service Delivery Strategies, the policies lay out the very worthwhile cooperative effort to address conflicting interests and priorities when planning quality water infrastructure.