Memorandum of Support

May 28, 2019

S.4291(Skoufis)/A.2261 (Abinanti)

Purpose: This bill amends the environmental conservation law by expanding the membership and powers of the resources planning council to manage and oversee the water resources of the state to ensure that all residents have access to adequate, affordable, safe drinking water in perpetuity.

Statement in Support: New York State is world renowned for its quality and quantity of valuable water resources. Our wetlands, rivers, streams, lakes and ponds provide a bounty of clean drinking water, which is also the life blood for agricultural, commercial and industrial operations. In addition, New York's waterways provide opportunities for recreation, education, research, aesthetic appreciation and essential ecosystem services. Yet for all these riches, the state does not seem to be keeping ahead of the threats to this invaluable resource. In spite of new water resource laws, the state continues to allow for excessive and wasteful water withdrawals. A statewide rash of PFAS contaminations and other chemical plumes endanger public drinking water. The infrastructure that supplies drinking water is billions of dollars behind in needed repairs and upgrades. New York is the only northeastern state not to address the Trump administration’s egregious roll back of the Clean Water Rule, which will leave as much as 40% of New York’s wetlands unprotected and endanger thousands of miles of headwater streams that feed our great rivers and lakes.

Unfortunately, the solutions to these problems are governed by separate state and local agencies that do not have a comprehensive plan or strategy binding their collective efforts to ensure NY’s water is being properly managed. In 1988, the New York Water Resources Planning Council (WRPC) was established under Environmental Conservation Law § 15-2901 for that purpose, but the 15-member panel charged with developing a statewide strategy for water management has rarely met and accomplished little in the past 25 years. It’s time to restore the mandate of this council and give it tools to be effective.

S.4291/A.2261 will increase the membership of the WRPC to include regional representation and expand its duties and powers to ensure that the New York has a statewide strategy to address water quality, equity, protection and abundance issues in a comprehensive manner and on an ongoing basis. The State of New York cannot afford continued mismanagement of this irreplaceable resource.

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter urges your support of this important legislation.