

January 30, 2019

Dear Honorable Senator Cohen, Representative Demicco, and distinguished members of the Environment Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Norwalk River Watershed Association which has a network of over 1300 active participants working to protect and improve water quality and wildlife habitat in our 7-town watershed.

We urge the environment committee to approve S.B. No. 753 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE-WIDE BAN ON FRACKING WASTE and S.B. No. 232 AN ACT CONCERNING THE ALLOWABLE PERCENTAGE OF LEAKAGE FROM GAS PIPELINES.

NRWA supports and applauds the comprehensive language in S.B. 753 which amends state statute to permanently ban all oil and gas well extraction waste, including fracking waste, waste from gas wells that are not fracked, brine that collects at the bottom of storage wells, leachate that drains out of landfills that have accepted extraction waste, and any by-products made from any of these wastes.

It is time for the state to act to protect our waterways from this toxic, radioactive waste. In the Norwalk River watershed, we have begun to act locally because of the lack of action on the state level. Redding, Ridgefield, Weston, and Norwalk have joined 52 other CT towns in passing ordinances similar in scope to SB 753, and each town saw overwhelming support from the community. Most recently, when Ridgefield held a town vote, citizens were lined up outside the filled-to-capacity venue in Town Hall. Weston's Town Hall was full of students and concerned citizens as well, and the Norwalk Ordinance Committee saw record numbers of attendees for its hearings leading up to the Common Council's vote to ban waste from oil and gas extraction.

At hearings in Norwalk, we heard from representatives of the shellfish industry who reminded us that the oyster industry brings in a commercial harvest worth \$30 million a year in CT. This figure does not include the value of recreational oyster harvests. In Norwalk 77,000 acres are considered oyster grounds and roughly 600 people are directly involved in harvesting. This number does not include many hundreds more that make up the fringe employment, truck drivers, shippers, inspectors, etc. The kelp industry is a new arrival, with a defined market still emerging. Another new industry underway is a large-scale effort to raise oysters on land through the early larval stages when they are most open to predatory forces and then releasing them to the wild once they set. All of these industries, established and emerging, involve food products and are predicated on clean water. One instance of contamination will shut down these businesses.

The Norwalk River watershed has an un-remediated brownfield and a superfund site, which contaminated drinking water in the 1970s and 1980s, so we know what contamination looks like. We look back on the leaders of the past who allowed such environmental and economic

devastation to occur and wonder ‘what were they thinking?’ The waste from today’s oil and gas extraction processes is the 21st century version of these threats.

Westchester County passed a permanent fracking waste ban in 2012, signed into law by the Republican County Executive. Republican-dominated Putnam County followed the next year. Across the Sound, Nassau & Suffolk Counties, passed waste bans years ago, and have gone back to amend and strengthen them since. All five boroughs of New York City banned fracking waste in 2016. The State of Vermont and many parts of New Jersey also have bans in place. It is time for Connecticut to wake up to the problem and do our part to protect Long Island Sound.

Please protect our industries, rivers, beaches, drinking water, fish and wildlife, and future generations from the sort of contamination we have seen in other states. There have been over 6,600 spills of this waste. Spills and inadequate treatment of discharge have contaminated rivers and drinking water supplies harming fish, wildlife and human health. What more proof do we need to pass a state ban? This is a public health and economic issue as well as an environmental one. We urge you to support SB 753 and SB 232.

Sincerely,

Louise Washer, President
Norwalk River Watershed Association
PO Box 197 Georgetown, CT 06829
203-856-1497 (cell)