



Dear Members of the Joint Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources,

We, the undersigned, are non-profits, businesses, local government entities, and residents of Massachusetts who support the passage of S.482/H.902, *An Act Promoting Drinking Water Quality for All*. This piece of legislation empowers the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection to set a minimum health-based standard for water quality in private wells used for drinking water. This bill also takes the additional step of extending the Commonwealth's existing Septic Repair Loan Fund to provide low-income homeowners with financial assistance for the remediation of contaminated drinking water wells. For most homeowners, however, the testing and remediation costs will be modest and can become part of their routine home maintenance costs over time.

A 2020–2022 study of over 500 private wells across the state conducted by RCAP Solutions and funded by The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts found that 32% had contamination levels exceeding the state's standards for a public water system and/or suggesting health risks. Common contaminants found in Massachusetts wells include arsenic, radon, uranium, coliform bacteria, and PFAS. These contaminants can cause a myriad of health complications including immune disorders, neurological disorders, digestive problems, organ failure, and cancer. The risk is particularly acute for families with young children, as they are particularly sensitive to contaminated water.

Dr. Alan Woolf, Director of the Pediatric Environmental Health Center and Associate Chief Medical Education Officer at Boston Children's Hospital, explained his endorsement of this bill in this video testimonial [here](#). The bill is consistent with an American Academy of Pediatrics [policy statement](#) released earlier this year and co-authored by Dr. Woolf, which includes this recommendation to government, "For housing that has drinking water supplied by a private well, states are encouraged to require testing for coliforms, nitrate, fluoride, perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, and any contaminant of local concern when a dwelling is sold, and the results ought to be made available to the buyer before closing."

There are also environmental consequences of unregulated private well water, as residents who are unsure of the quality and safety of their drinking water may resort to bottled water, which can be costly and increases the use and disposal of plastic water bottles, most of which end up in landfills.

Beyond the health and environmental impacts, strengthening private well protections is broadly popular across the state. In a recent public opinion survey conducted by MassINC Polling Group, over 1,000 Massachusetts residents were asked their thoughts on private well safety and regulation. According to the poll, 73% of Massachusetts residents think private well water should be protected in the same way as other sources of drinking water. Nearly all of those polled agree that all Massachusetts residents should have access to safe drinking water (97%) and that state government should play a role in achieving that goal (92%). There was a clear majority supporting these statements, regardless of demographics or party affiliation. The poll also found a worrisome gap in well water testing rates. Only 21% of well users had tested their water in the past year and another 21% were not sure when their water was last tested. Just over half (53%) of well users reported they had not paid anything for well testing or maintenance in the past year.

Other key findings from the survey:

- Three-quarters (75%) support proposed legislation to enable the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection to develop statewide private well protections.



- There was even stronger support (80%) when it was explained that the proposed legislation includes financial support for remediation of contamination for low-income homeowners with private wells.
- A clear majority (57%) “strongly support” testing well water before a home is sold, and 72% of private well owners support such a policy to some extent (“strongly support” or “somewhat support”).

This poll results are available at this [link](#). Much like the public, public health officials also strongly support this bill. The Boards of Health of Templeton, Harvard, Ware, Pelham, and Lakeville have endorsed the bill. Regional bodies such as the Quabbin Health District and the Leicester Public Health Coalition have also supported the bill. Chris Mitchell of the Harvard Board of Health phrased his agency’s support thusly, “Authorizing MassDEP to develop health-based standards for private wells will give local Boards of Health the guidance and technical support these mostly volunteer organizations need. Using the Title 5 Septic Regulations as model will expand on an established framework allowing local boards to regulate with consistency.”

In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, over half a million residents rely on private wells for drinking, cooking, and washing. These households lack the same basic protections the state affords to individuals on a public water system, leaving them vulnerable to contaminants such as PFAS, arsenic, radon, uranium, E. coli, and more. The inequity should be addressed as soon as possible, as many Massachusetts residents continue to unknowingly drink contaminated private well water.

As a result, we, the undersigned, strongly support S.482/H.902 as a necessary step toward guaranteeing every Massachusetts resident access to safe drinking water. Please consider supporting this legislation and reporting it favorably out of committee without delay.

Thank you again for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

Organizations

Brian Scales, President and CEO, RCAP Solutions



Amie Shei, President and CEO, The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts



Individuals