
Local Government Committee

HB 1690

Brief Description: Assessing the state's existing water and sewer systems.

Sponsors: Representatives Wylie, Berry, Fosse, Hunt, Parshley, Fey, Doglio, Berg, Scott, Pollet, Nance, Stonier and Duerr.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Ecology and the Department of Health to jointly produce a continuing and comprehensive assessment of the maintenance and upgrade needs of water and sewer systems throughout the state.

Hearing Date: 2/11/25

Staff: Kellen Wright (786-7134).

Background:

Water Systems.

Public water systems supply drinking water for about 85 percent of the residents of Washington. A public water system is any system providing water for human consumption through pipes or other constructed means of transference, except for systems serving only a single residence or a system with four or fewer connections that serves a single farm. A water system includes collection, treatment, storage, and distribution facilities, as well as other facilities primarily used in connection with water systems.

Public water systems are divided into two categories, Group A and Group B. Group A water systems are those that have met one or more of the following criteria:

- The system has more than 15 service connections, regardless of the number of people

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served.

- The system serves an average of 25 or more people for at least 60 days in a year, regardless of the number of service connections.
- The system serves at least 1,000 people for at least two consecutive days.

Group B water systems are those systems not included in Group A.

The State Board of Health is required to adopt rules for these water systems in order to ensure safe and reliable public drinking water and to protect public health. The rules are enforced by the Department of Health and local health jurisdictions such as a county or city health department.

Public water systems can be operated by counties, cities, special purpose districts, or private entities.

The 15 percent of Washington residents who do not get their water from public water systems instead get water from private wells. The Department of Ecology regulates the construction of wells, and local health jurisdictions enforce regulations for water quality and the use of wells.

Sewer Systems.

There are two general types of sewer systems: (1) onsite systems, which treat or store wastewater near the site of origin; and (2) sewer utilities, in which wastewater is removed from the site, generally for treatment at a wastewater facility. Regulatory authority is divided between the systems.

The State Board of Health has rulemaking authority for smaller onsite sewage systems, with enforcement handled by the Department of Health and local health jurisdictions. Larger onsite systems and smaller wastewater systems are regulated by the Department of Health, while the larger wastewater systems are regulated by the Department of Ecology.

Sewer services may be provided by counties, cities, special purpose districts, or private entities.

Drinking Water Needs Survey and Assessment.

Every four years, the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducts a Drinking Water Needs Survey and Assessment of public water systems. A representative sample of water systems complete the survey, and the EPA uses the results to determine the capital needs of water systems throughout the United States for the next 20 years. In 2021 the capital improvement needs of Washington's Group A water systems through 2041 was calculated to be \$11.7 billion.

State Funding Programs.

Water and sewer systems can receive funding through multiple state programs. Among the

largest sources of funding are the Public Works Assistance Account, the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, and the Water Quality Combined Funding Program.

Through the Public Works Assistance Account, the Department of Commerce disburses grants and loans to counties, cities, and special purpose districts to repair, replace, and build infrastructure. Water and sewer systems are among the infrastructure systems eligible to receive funding.

The Drinking Water State Revolving Fund provides funding for infrastructure improvements of drinking water systems. It is funded by the state and the federal government and provides grants and loans for a variety of purposes, including loans for capital improvements that improve public health and increase compliance with drinking water regulations, or grants for chemical mitigation and remediation.

The Water Quality Combined Funding Program is administered by the Department of Ecology. It is funded through the state budget, and there are \$100 million to \$200 million available in annual funding. Funding can be used for, among other things, the design and construction of wastewater facilities and onsite sewage systems.

Summary of Bill:

The Department of Ecology and the Department of Health (Departments) must jointly conduct and produce a continuing comprehensive needs assessment of the maintenance and upgrade needs for water and sewer systems throughout the state to prevent pollution, protect public health, and support communities and the economy.

At a minimum, the assessment must include:

- a consolidated database of water and sewer systems in the state that are in need of critical upgrades or maintenance;
- an analysis of the costs required to upgrade and maintain the systems; and
- options for program design and funding strategies.

In relation to the assessment, the Departments may:

- consult with, and solicit data from, state agencies, boards, and commissions; cities and counties; local boards of health; public and private water and sewer utilities; conservation districts; and other entities as necessary to obtain detailed information on water and sewer facilities in the state;
- review relevant projects from other states to inform the assessment; and
- report to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature by every June 1 of even-numbered years.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.