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Plan to Provide Cleaner Water Passes the Senate

MADISON— Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after the state Senate passed 2021 Assembly Bill 243 – authored by Senator Cowles, Representative Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay) and others – which targets \$61 million in federal relief funding towards water quality and infrastructure improvements across the state of Wisconsin:

“Assembly Bill 243 is a keystone of the Legislature’s Responsible Stimulus Plan by highlighting the importance that our state’s water infrastructure can have on public health, our economy and home values, and our environment. Each effort targets needed investments, including replacing around 20,000 lead laterals to promote childhood health and development, reducing pollution runoff through structural and nonstructural improvements in urban and rural areas, providing more clean water to rural low-income residents on well water, and learning more about the water we drink through regional studies. These items represent strong consensus provisions related to water improvements that largely align with the Governor’s budget proposal, and recognizes Congress’ intent of making investments in water quality and infrastructure as a means of building employment, sustaining and growing our economy, and providing a unique opportunity to address this vital issue.”

Water infrastructure improvements was a [designated purpose](#) for federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act. Assembly Bill 243 requires the Governor to designate \$61 million received from the latest federal COVID relief bill for the following water quality and infrastructure related purposes:

1. \$40 million to provide principal forgiveness loans to municipalities to cover up to 50% of the cost of the replacement of private-side lead water service lines, which will be run through the existing Safe Drinking Water Loan Program at the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).
2. \$12 million to the existing Urban Nonpoint Source Water Pollution Abatement and Storm Water Management Program at the DNR to continue funding municipal projects and planning that reduces urban runoff through stormwater retention, proper drainage systems, and more.
3. \$6.5 million to the existing Rural Nonpoint Source Program which is intended to pick up where the Soil and Water Management Program leaves off by funding the implementation of agricultural best management practices needed to achieve water quality goals.
4. \$2 million to the existing Well Compensation Grant Program at the DNR which provides 75% of the project cost, up to \$12,000, for rural low-income residents to replace contaminated drinking water wells with water testing above standards for certain contaminants.
5. \$500,000 to a new well testing program, run through the DNR with a new statutory structure established by the bill, to provide up to \$10,000 to counties for new well testing efforts or \$2,500 to counties to improve existing well testing efforts, with results provided to UW-Stevens Point.

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