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Bills to Remove and Streamline Some Water Utility Regulations Pass Senate

MADISON– Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after four bills he authored – Assembly Bills 300 and 302 and Senate Bills 488 and 489 – impacting the regulation of water utilities by the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) and Department of Natural Resources (DNR) passed the state Senate on a voice vote during today’s floor session:

“These four efforts are the result of months, and in some cases, years’ worth of work with groups representing leaders in water utilities of all sizes from around the state. Each of these bills recognizes that the responsibilities placed on Wisconsin’s drinking water experts can be a hard enough job without unnecessary regulatory hurdles, and responds to those concerns with some important and common-sense changes.

“By reducing some of the cumbersome red tape through these four bills, we can help to shorten some of the time spent in regulatory processes, provide more administrative certainty, and lessen the unnecessary rubber stamps that water utilities must obtain. I want to thank my co-authors and the supporters of these bills who’ve helped to drive these changes, and I look forward to further action on these bills.”

The four bills authored by Senator Cowles that passed the state Senate today includes:

- [2021 Assembly Bill 300](#) – In recent years, some water utilities seeking a Certificate of Authority to perform a construction project or approval of a Lead Service Line Replacement Program have experienced lengthy delays in having their applications addressed. Assembly Bill 300, which is authored with Representative Jeremy Thiesfeldt (R-Fond du Lac), looks to put a stop to unnecessary delays by requiring that the PSC act on these applications in a timely manner. After approval by the Assembly in June, this bill will now head to the Governor for his consideration to become law.
- [2021 Assembly Bill 302](#) – With unclear regulations in current law resulting in costly and lengthy approval processes for water utilities to undergo common water meter replacement projects, Assembly Bill 302 makes a simple change to exempt water meter projects from needing PSC approval. This change will align water utility meter projects with regulations around similar projects for electric utilities. After approval by the Assembly in June, Assembly Bill 302, which is authored with Representative Nancy VanderMeer (R-Tomah), will now head to the Governor for his consideration.

- [2021 Senate Bill 488](#) – Facing an impending deadline in 2025 for water utilities serving 10,000 or more residents to submit water supply service area plan to the DNR for approval, Senate Bill 488, which is authored with Representative John Spiros (R-Marshfield), lessens the burdens of this planning process and the complex regulatory outcomes by removing required approvals for most utilities and making a number of other substantive changes. With the Senate’s approval of this important measure to prevent contradictory regulatory orders, this legislation awaits action in the Assembly.
- [2021 Senate Bill 489](#) – While the Safe Drinking Water Loan Program and Clean Water Fund Program have operated successfully over the past couple of decades to offer low interest loans for water and wastewater utility projects, stakeholders have noted the need for some statutory updates to simplify the application and award processes and better align the two programs. These consensus changes are reflected in Senate Bill 489. The companion to Senate Bill 489, which is authored with Representative Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay), has been heard and awaits a vote in an Assembly committee.

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