



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 15, 2016

Contact:

Cheryl Nenn
cheryl_nenn@milwaukeekeeper.org
(414) 378-3043

Senate schedules last-minute vote on water privatization bill tomorrow despite widespread public opposition

MILWAUKEE – Today, we just learned that Senate Republicans have added AB 554, the controversial water privatization bill, to the Senate agenda tomorrow for debate and passage. AB 554 is a bill that threatens drinking water for millions of Wisconsinites and opens the door to corporate control of Wisconsin’s water utilities. No municipality has requested this bill, which would make it easier for public water utilities to privatize operations. It was introduced at the behest of a private company called Aqua America, looking to move into the Wisconsin market.

In addition, the Wisconsin League of Municipalities has withdrawn their support for this bill. In a legislative update published today, they reported: *“Last week, the League’s Board of Directors voted unanimously to change the association’s position on AB 554/SB 532, modifying the process for selling municipal water utilities, from support to oppose. The bill changes the referendum requirement for selling a municipal water utility from mandatory to optional. The League initially viewed the bill as restoring policy decision making to elected municipal officials, but after giving the issue further review the board concluded the process in current law for selling a water utility should remain in place. The board believes that a mandatory referendum is preferable and better recognizes the extraordinary public investment municipal taxpayers have made in municipal water utility assets.”*

Cheryl Nenn, from Milwaukee Riverkeeper explains, "Currently, we have a safeguard in our State law that requires a public referendum before any utility can be sold or leased to a private entity. As part of this, our Public Service Commission also does an analysis before that referendum looking at the value of the utility to ensure that if a sale goes through that the taxpayers are getting a good “price” so to speak. This bill would remove these protections and make it easier for private water companies to sway local municipalities or utilities to privatize. This legislation benefits the private water industry while removing the transparency and accountability that allows citizens and local elected officials to ensure safe drinking water. “



"Providing clean, safe drinking water and safe treatment of sewage is one of the most important functions of government. Maintaining public control of utilities provides a greater level of transparency and accountability that only comes with oversight by an electorate. [New Jersey passed a similar type of legislation](#) in February; as a result, people throughout the state have fewer public processes to ensure public control of their water utilities," said Kimberly Wright, Executive Director of Midwest Environmental Advocates.

Milwaukee Riverkeeper is urging the Senate to vote against AB 554 on what is an election day. Water privatization schemes are being rolled back across the country due to increased water cost, decreased quality of drinking water, and diminished accountability and transparency to ratepayers and voters.

Milwaukee Riverkeeper urges State residents to contact their Senator by phone today or tonight or to voice concerns to their State Senators here:

<http://milwaukeekeeper.org/act-now-say-no-to-wisconsin-water-privatization/>

###

About Milwaukee Riverkeeper

Milwaukee Riverkeeper's mission is to protect, improve and advocate for water quality, riparian wildlife habitat, and sound land management in the Milwaukee, Menomonee, and Kinnickinnic River Watersheds. We envision a future in which people from all walks of life can enjoy the healthy waterways of the Milwaukee River Basin.

Milwaukee Riverkeeper advocates for compliance with environmental laws and is licensed by the Waterkeeper Alliance, a network with over 266 organizations worldwide dedicated to clean water and healthy communities. For more information about Milwaukee Riverkeeper, visit

www.milwaukeekeeper.org