

NEW HAMPSHIRE WATER POLLUTION CONTROL ASSOCIATION

February 17, 2025

Rep. Gregory Hill, Chair
House Committee on Legislative Administration
NH State House of Representatives
Legislative Office Building, Rm 203
Concord, NH 03301
Submitted: Via Committee Email

RE: Concerns regarding HB 314 relative to prohibiting the use of federal, state, or local funds for lobbying activities.

Dear Chair Hill and committee members,

New Hampshire Water Pollution Control Association (NHWPCA) is a nonprofit membership organization that provides education, workforce training, knowledge, and advocacy for NH's clean water utilities who operate in the municipal, industrial, and private wastewater collections systems across NH. Our members include a range of professionals related to and in support of water works, including but not limited to wastewater treatment plant operators, collection system operators, civil, design, and environmental engineers, vendors, and local and state government officials.

NHWPCA is writing to express concerns related to House Bill 314 titled "An act relative to prohibiting the use of federal, state, or local funds for lobbying activities," as introduced. NHWPCA believes that this bill poses significant challenges and unintended consequences that could hinder the democratic process and impede the ability of citizens to advocate for their interests effectively.

HB 314 restricts essential advocacy efforts conducted by New Hampshire Water Pollution Control Association and organizations like us that may receive "public funds" from entities including Wastewater Treatment Plants and Public Works Departments in the form of membership dues. Many non-profit organizations, advocacy groups, and community services rely on membership dues, government grants and appropriations to carry out their missions effectively. By prohibiting the use of public funds to "lobby, attempt to influence legislation, participate in political activity, or contribute funds to any entity for the purpose of engaging in same," this bill would severely limit the ability of NHWPCA to engage in advocacy efforts aimed at addressing clean water issues and informing policy decisions that directly impact our members. NH professional organizations are a way of getting our members voices heard while they manage the day-to-day demands of protecting clean water and public health.

HB 314 fails to adequately distinguish and define lobbying activities aimed at influencing legislation and legitimate efforts to provide information and educate policymakers. Restricting all forms of advocacy funded by public resources, without exception, would undermine NHWPCA's ability to collaborate with policymakers, regulatory agencies, and stakeholders to inform and develop effective strategies and legislation that promote responsible water management practices and address emerging environmental concerns. By actively engaging in the legislative process, NHWPCA advocates for science-based solutions, innovation, and sustainable practices that benefit communities, ecosystems, and future generations.

Additionally, the provision to impose criminal penalties and personal liability on individuals who authorize spending of public funds in violation of the proposed restrictions is excessive and unwarranted. Such punitive measures could deter public servants and employees from engaging in legitimate advocacy efforts out of fear of legal repercussions, thereby chilling free speech and stifling civic engagement.

In conclusion, while transparency and accountability in government spending is important, House Bill 314 is not the appropriate means to achieve these goals. Instead, NHWPCA urges the Committee to consider alternative approaches that strike a balance between preventing misuse of public funds and safeguarding the constitutional rights of citizens to engage in advocacy and political expression.

The NHWPCA and its members are committed stewards of the environment. Thank you for considering these comments and for helping us meet our mission of protecting public health through safely managing wastewater, while maintaining rate and taxpayer affordability.

Respectfully submitted,

Aaron Costa, NHWPCA President



April Sargent, Board of Directors &
Government Affairs Committee Chair



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