

TO: MEMBERS OF THE SENATE AND ASSEMBLY

FROM: LAWRIE KOBZA, MEG-WATER LEGAL COUNSEL

DATE: FEBRUARY 16, 2011

RE: MEG - WATER CONCERNS WITH SPECIAL SESSION SENATE BILL 11
AND ITS IMPACT ON MUNICIPAL WATER UTILITIES

MEG-Water is a statewide association of municipal water utilities. Our members are responsible for providing safe drinking water to the residents of this State. In carrying out this responsibility, we meet federal standards for water quality, we maintain an extensive network of water infrastructure, and we provide excellent customer service. Our customers pay for the water they use, and the rates charged to customers are approved by the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin.

Municipal water utilities operate just as any other business, and they should have the same ability to operate effectively and efficiently. Special Session SB 11 hamstring a municipal water utility's ability to operate like any other business.

A major challenge of municipal water utilities is attracting and retaining quality employees. Our workforce is aging, and there is a limited pool of qualified professionals to take their places. There are few training programs for new water utility professionals, and there are few incentives for young people to choose this work as a career. It is not readily transferrable to the private sector, it is not highly compensated, and it requires residency near the job location.

Please do not make it more difficult for municipal water utilities to attract and retain high quality employees. Do not restrict the ability of municipal water utilities to offer competitive salaries and fringe benefits for the water utility professionals needed to run the water systems. The change we request will not limit the State's ability to address its budget deficit. The compensation of municipal water utility employees is not paid for with state funds or property tax revenue.

Please do not jeopardize the ability of water utilities to continue to provide safe water to the public.