

July 5, 2022

Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
24 Beacon St. Room 212  
Boston, MA 02133

Chair Rodrigues, Vice Chair Friedman, and Members of the Committee,

**On behalf of the 55 undersigned organizations, we write in support of S.530, *An Act relative to maintaining adequate water supplies through effective drought management*, and urge the committee to report the bill out favorably.**

Most of the state is currently in a drought. On June 15th, Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) declared a Significant Drought in the Northeast and Southeast Regions, and a Mild Drought in the Connecticut River Valley, Central, and Islands Regions.<sup>1</sup>

Massachusetts has been dealing with persistent drought for years. In 2016, we experienced extreme drought conditions statewide, causing \$18 million in crop damages to local farmers, and six communities to declare water supply emergencies.<sup>2</sup> In 2020 those conditions returned, rolling into 2021. Scientists at EPA, USGS, and NOAA predict that droughts in Massachusetts will become more frequent and more severe due to climate change<sup>3</sup>, so the state must scale up our drought management to meet the planet's needs.

Under current regulations, the Governor can require water conservation only during a drought **emergency**, at which point the state would be experiencing crop failure, increased fire danger, loss of aquatic life, and threats to the water supply. It is far more prudent to conserve water in the early stages of drought to prevent such emergencies from occurring.

Right now, each city or town implements its own water conservation measures. Some towns impose total watering bans while others (often drawing from the same stressed water source) do nothing. This results in an ineffective and inequitable patchwork of policies with limited relief for rivers.

S.530 will give EEA the authority to require uniform water conservation measures during a declared drought, ensuring that Massachusetts handles drought more responsibly. Limiting nonessential outdoor watering is a cost-effective first line of defense against drought with nearly no impact on homeowners, and no additional cost to the state. Essential water use, including all indoor water use, agriculture and golf courses, is exempt from these restrictions. The proposed water conservation measures were created by a team of state and federal experts, and are laid out in the state's 2019 Drought Management Plan.<sup>4</sup> Passing S.530 will put this expertise into action, allowing the state to require a gradual escalation of uniform outdoor watering restrictions during drought.

Massachusetts has been a leader on climate mitigation and adaptation. This legislation is an opportunity to increase our climate readiness by scaling up our drought response and water conservation efforts to ensure water supply for our communities and ecosystems.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me ([katharinelange@massriversalliance.org](mailto:katharinelange@massriversalliance.org)) with any questions or if there is any additional information we may provide.

Sincerely,

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Massachusetts Rivers Alliance

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Association to Preserve Cape Cod

Adam Sacks  
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Jacqueline Royce  
Boston Green Action

Frederic B. Jennings Jr., Ph.D.  
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Alison Dixon  
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Wayne Castonguay  
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