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Public Hearing on SB 6278

2019-20, Concerning water withdrawals for commercial bottled water production.
Washington House Committee on Rural Development, Agriculture, & Natural Resources
February 26, 2020

Position: Support

Good morning. Thank you, Chair Blake and other committee members for the opportunity to address you today. I'm Thomas Meyer, a resident of Washington State and the National Climate Organizing Manager for Food & Water Action and Food & Water Watch.

On behalf of our 43,000 supporters in Washington State, ***I strongly urge you to support SB 6278*** to prohibit new water rights for commercial bottled water production.

This bill will protect our state's water resources for the public good and the public wellbeing. Extracting local water supplies, putting them in plastic bottles and shipping them around the country for profit is not in the interest of our state or our planet.

I want to take this opportunity to address two concerns that have been raised about the bill: the rights of local officials to make decisions, and jobs.

First, this legislation protects the water of all people in Washington. Local jurisdictions need state legislation to protect their water from the bottled water industry, and it is in the interest of the state to manage its limited freshwater resources from a statewide perspective. Some towns, especially small rural towns, have struggled to stop bottled water companies, which have threatened lawsuits against the towns in order to extract their water. The Lewis County Water Alliance has seen this directly, and they are not alone.

More broadly, water does not respect local political boundaries and it is best managed on a watershed basis. The decisions of one local jurisdiction to allow a massive water bottling plant could impair the water availability for a neighboring town. This law ensures that one town isn't allowing water bottle extraction to the detriment of its neighbors.

When bottled water companies withdraw water, they do not replenish what they pump out.¹ This is a key difference between water bottlers and other uses, including local irrigation and local agricultural water users, who do return water to help replenish watersheds.² Groundwater and surface waters are often connected and when an aquifer is over-pumped, water levels of a connected surface water body can fall and water flows can change.³ Large-scale groundwater extraction, such as for water bottling plants, can reduce the availability of local groundwater

and surface water sources.⁴ In fact, after Nestlé began pumping groundwater from a Michigan aquifer, water flows in connected surface waters fell to the point that mud flats developed.⁵

Next, I want to address a claim from the bottled water industry about job creation. The reality is that the industry creates very few jobs and these jobs tend to be dangerous. Nationally, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 569 bottled water manufacturing sites in the entire country in 2018. Each site employed an average of 29 people.⁶ That year, the injury rate for bottled water manufacturing was nearly twice the average of all private sector jobs and 60 percent higher than the average manufacturing job.⁷

Plus, the damage of the bottled water industry could cost far more jobs than it may potentially bring. A study from McCloud, California found that a proposed bottling plant could have scared away several higher-paying employers, partly by congesting public services and infrastructure.⁸ To transport the water bottles, large trucks would have needed to make 600 trips a day, which would have considerably increased traffic on local roads, reduced the community's quality of life and repelled other businesses.⁹

This legislation eliminates the risk that the bottled water industry would overuse local water supplies. It protects jobs in key local economic sectors such as local farming, fishing, and tourism.

SB 6278 would help preserve our water, our most precious resource, for current and future generations. I use you to support this legislation. Thank you.

Endnotes

¹ Boldt-Van Rooy, Tara. "'Bottling Up' Our Natural Resources: The Fight Over Bottled Water Extraction in the United States." *Journal of Land Use*, vol. 18, iss.2, Spring 2003 at 279 and 280.

² Boldt-Van Rooy, Tara. "'Bottling Up' Our Natural Resources: The Fight Over Bottled Water Extraction in the United States." *Journal of Land Use*, vol. 18, iss.2, Spring 2003 at 279 and 280.

³ Winter, T.C. et al. U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey. "Ground Water and Surface Water. A Single Source." U.S. Geological Survey Circular 1139. 1998. at iii, 1 and 14.

⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office. "Bottled Water: FDA Safety and Consumer Protections are Often Less Stringent than Comparable EPA Protections for Tap Water." (GAO-09-610.) June 2009 at 26 and 27.

⁵ Madigan, Kate. PIRGIM Education Fund. "Left Out to Dry: How Michigan Citizens Pay the Price for Unregulated Water Use." September 2005 at 13.

⁶ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages. Private, All Industry Aggregations, U.S. TOTAL, 2018 Annual Averages, All Establishment Sizes, last modified January 2, 2020.

⁷ injury rate of bottled water manufacturing= 5.4 cases per 100 workers. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, in cooperation with participating state agencies. Table 1 - Incidence rates - detailed industry level - 2018

⁸ Edmiston, Kelly D. "The net effects of large plant locations and expansions on county employment." *Journal of Regional Science*, vol, 44, iss. 2. 2004 at 289 to 319.

⁹ ECONorthwest. "The Potential Economic Effects of the Proposed Water Bottling Facility in McCloud." October 2007.