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Date: April 5, 2021

To: Honorable Timothy Briglin, Chair; Honorable Laura Sibilgia, Vice Chair;
Members, House Committee on Energy and Technology

RE: Comments on Water and Wastewater Utility Arrearages

As representatives of the state's public drinking water and wastewater systems, the Vermont Rural Water Association is providing feedback on arrearages. **We urge you to continue to include all public drinking water and wastewater utilities in the state's customer bill assistance programs.**

In addition to the 20 private water companies regulated by the Public Utilities Commission, there are approximately 400 community water systems who provide drinking water to cities and towns, fire districts, homeowners associations, mobile home parks, and other residential utilities. Whether owned by a private entity, municipality, association or cooperative, all water systems who serve over 25 people are considered public water systems and subject to federal and state environmental regulations.

On the wastewater side, there are over 100 municipal systems who bill customers for sewer services. This includes cities and towns with a wastewater treatment plant and those who maintain their own sewer lines and pump stations, but send their wastewater to other municipalities for treatment.

These **500 water and wastewater utilities continue to be subject to the shutoff moratorium** that has been in place for the past year. The moratorium on disconnections was established by Act 92, Section 9, which was signed by the Governor on March 30, 2020. This moratorium is in place until the end of the State of Emergency—currently April 15, 2021, but likely will continue to be extended.

In November 2020, the Vermont COVID-19 Arrearage Assistance Program (VCAAP) was expanded to include overdue drinking water and wastewater bills. The program was established in July 2020 using federal CARES Act funding. Initially, only utilities regulated by the Public Utility Commission were eligible for ratepayer assistance. The program was later expanded to include customers of all water and sewer utilities. Vermont Rural Water assisted with outreach and communications with public drinking water and wastewater utilities when they were added to the VCAAP program in November 2020.

When advocating for water and wastewater utilities to be included in VCAAP during September 2020, we estimated delinquent bills at \$1.4 million. A January 2021 survey by the Green Mountain Water Environment Association estimated **water and wastewater arrearages had grown to \$5.2 million.**

For these reasons, we urge you to continue funding arrearage assistance for all public drinking water and wastewater utilities.

Thank you,

Liz Royer, Executive Director

The Vermont Rural Water Association is a nonprofit that supports public drinking water and wastewater systems and promotes public health and clean water protection through technical assistance, training, advocacy, and outreach.