

City of Barre, Vermont

“Granite Center of the World”



February 6th, 2025

Re: Vermont Traditions Coalition Testimony on S.224

Chair Watson and Members of the Senate Natural Resources & Energy Committee,

I am writing to provide an operational perspective on testimony presented in opposition to S.224, particularly as it relates to the Dix Reservoir and the day-to-day responsibility of operating Barre's drinking water system.

I serve as the Superintendent of the City of Barre's water and wastewater treatment facilities. My role is to ensure that safe drinking water is delivered to residents every day, that the system remains in compliance with state and federal requirements, and that we are prepared to respond when conditions change or problems arise. From that standpoint, several assertions made during the testimony do not reflect how drinking water systems actually function in practice.

When something goes wrong at a raw water source, operators do not have the luxury of hindsight or theory. We are required to make immediate decisions with incomplete information, while maintaining compliance and protecting public health. Once a contaminant enters the reservoir, our options are limited. There is no practical way to predict what might be introduced during a large, organized event, and no operational switch that allows us to compensate in advance for unknown risks.

The testimony suggested that if there is concern about contamination, the treatment plant should simply address it. From an operational standpoint, that misunderstands the limits of treatment. Many contaminants of concern, especially petroleum-based substances, are not detected by routine real-time monitoring and are not easily removed through conventional treatment processes. By the time an issue is identified, water may already be moving through the system. At that point, operators are managing consequences, not preventing harm.

It is also important to understand that operational risk is not evenly distributed. Large, organized events fundamentally change the conditions we must manage. More people, more vehicles, and more equipment mean a higher likelihood of accidental spills, fuel releases, and improper

disposal of waste. This is not a comment on individual intent or behavior. It is a basic reality of system operations and risk management.

When testimony suggests that the solution to these risks is plant upgrades, it overlooks what that means operationally. Major upgrades require years of planning, regulatory review, and capital investment, during which operators must continue to meet all compliance obligations. These costs fall on ratepayers, not on those creating the additional risk. From an operations perspective, preventing contamination at the source is always preferable to reacting to it downstream.

I also want to address the implication that concerns raised by Barre City staff or coordination with law enforcement represent overreach. In practice, coordination is essential. When we become aware of activities that could affect the reservoir, we must assess staffing, access control, emergency response readiness, and potential follow-up actions. These are operational necessities, not discretionary choices.

The current situation arose because existing law did not give the City a clear role once a state permit had already been issued for a large event at our drinking water source. Seeking clearer authority and better coordination tools is a practical response to an operational gap that operators and municipal staff are left to manage in real time.

I share this operational perspective to ensure the Committee's consideration of S.224 reflects the real-world responsibilities borne by water system operators. I appreciate your time and am available to provide additional information if needed.

Respectfully,

Jake Drown

Superintendent, Water and Wastewater Treatment, City of Barre