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New Jersey's water must be protected for everyone, by everyone

The recommendations made by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection's (NJDEP) Drinking Water Quality Institute (DWQI) are of critical importance and affect us all. Such a body should base its work on sound science, have representation from all stakeholders, and be comprised of individuals with academic and professional experience that allow them to fully consider and understand all available science. That is why I believe that openness, sound science, and transparency should be the underpinnings of DWQI's process or of any regulatory process.

Some have said that A-2123 jeopardizes the independence of DWQI and its decisions. This bill does not do that. Nor will the commercial and industrial communities have a controlling say in the body's proceedings should the bill, sponsored by Assemblyman Burzichelli, become law.

A-2123 ensures transparency and follows the governmental improvements being advocated by Governor Christie's bi-partisan Red Tape Review Commission. Even the United States Environmental Protection Agency seeks to create such transparency through its Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS), which evaluates risk information on effects that may result from exposure to environmental contaminants. IRIS places an emphasis on the review of all available science and has a robust public comment process, and New Jersey should follow the federal government's lead in this area.

Presently, DWQI is comprised of six state government representatives and nine public members, three who represent the academic scientific community, three who represent water companies and three who represent the public. A-2123 would add three public seats to represent the commercial and industrial communities, increasing the total public membership to 12 out of 18 total seats. Providing the commercial and industrial sector scientists with a voice within DWQI is an appropriate, measured approach to inclusive rulemaking. However, three seats on a public body with 18 members hardly "stacks the deck" in favor of industry, as Mr. Pringle asserts in [Hands off New Jersey's drinking water](#). All stakeholders should have a voice and this legislation ensures that all views are indeed represented. At the end of the day, the NJDEP still retains the authority to set the standards as it sees fit.

At a time when the public is asking for more government transparency, this bill will direct NJDEP to make its standards development process, much of which begins at DWQI, more accessible and transparent to the public. NJDEP will be required to share details about its activities with the public, as well as asking all interested parties to submit data and other sound scientific studies to the NJDEP for its consideration. Another benefit is the requirement that the NJDEP provide meaningful public comment periods along the process before its standards are finalized. I would equate these public comment periods to the public hearings that our legislators hold before voting on the many bills they consider each session. Surely, advocates for business



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and environmental groups alike would welcome the opportunity for every interested citizen to be able to voice their support or opposition to a particular issue and be afforded the courtesy of a considered response.

For a body making such important decisions, it is not unwarranted to demand excellence from its members. At the very least the public members, including those who would represent the commercial and industrial communities, should hold professionally recognized, relevant academic qualifications in addition to having backgrounds in environmental health and safety issues. Making sure that those individuals who develop drinking water standards are scientifically qualified is certainly a benefit to all New Jerseyans.

There is no question in my mind that A-2123 will improve the regulatory framework, ensure the ability for all sound science to be considered, and that scientifically justified responses are made to address all stakeholder input and comments. But ultimately, this bill will ensure that all New Jerseyans continue to have access to safe and clean drinking water.

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