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The Safe Drinking Water Initiative

Protecting Massachusetts Drinking Water by Preventing Contamination Before It Becomes a Public Health Crisis

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Core Commitment

Every Massachusetts resident deserves safe, clean, affordable drinking water.

Whether you live in a city, suburb, or rural community, families should never have to wonder whether their tap water is safe or whether their local water system can afford the infrastructure needed to keep it that way.

Massachusetts has already become a national leader in regulating PFAS ("forever chemicals"). The next step is becoming the national leader in preventing contamination, supporting municipalities, and preparing for the next generation of emerging contaminants.

Instead of waiting for contamination to become a crisis, we should invest in prevention, innovation, and partnerships that protect public health while lowering long-term costs for communities and ratepayers.

Build on What's Working

Massachusetts has already made significant progress.

The Commonwealth has:

- Established one of the nation's first enforceable PFAS drinking water standards.
- Required statewide PFAS monitoring.
- Helped municipalities finance treatment infrastructure through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund.
- Supported communities investing in modern water treatment technologies.

These are important accomplishments, but we cannot stop here.

Massachusetts knows how to find PFAS. We now need a statewide strategy to remove it, prevent future contamination, and help every community afford the infrastructure needed to keep drinking water safe.

Communities need technical expertise, affordable financing, modern treatment technology, and long-term state partnerships. The next phase of drinking water policy should focus on helping every community achieve the same success as Massachusetts' leading water systems.

The Rockland Model

One Massachusetts community has already shown what success looks like.

After discovering PFAS contamination in 2019, the Abington–Rockland Joint Water Works (ARJWW) did not wait for regulations to require action.

Instead, the utility:

- Began testing before state requirements took effect.
- Partnered with MassDEP to evaluate treatment options.
- Piloted Granular Activated Carbon (GAC) treatment.
- Secured a $26 million 0% interest State Revolving Fund loan.
- Leveraged additional ARPA and MassWorks funding.
- Constructed permanent treatment systems using the latest filtration technology.

The Result

Today (as of June 2026), the Hannigan Water Treatment Plant has reduced PFAS6 levels to **Non-Detect**—below laboratory detection limits and well below Massachusetts drinking water standards.

Rockland proves that communities can successfully eliminate PFAS contamination when they have the right partners, financing, and technology.

The goal of this plan is simple → Make the Rockland model available to every community in Massachusetts.

Pillar 1: The MA Safe Drinking Water Partnership

Protecting drinking water requires more than regulations. It requires state agencies, municipalities, scientists, engineers, and local water suppliers working together.

What

Create a permanent statewide partnership that coordinates:

- drinking water protection
- groundwater protection
- contamination response
- municipal technical assistance
- emergency planning
- public education

The partnership would build on existing agencies while improving coordination and reducing duplication.

Why

Communities shouldn't have to solve complex contamination problems on their own. **A coordinated state response saves time, money, and protects public health.**

Pillar 2: The MA Water Quality Innovation Council

Massachusetts should become the national leader in drinking water innovation.

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What

Establish a permanent Water Quality Innovation Council made up of:

- universities
- municipal water systems
- wastewater utilities
- environmental engineers
- public health experts
- environmental organizations
- organized labor
- business leaders
- municipal officials
- environmental justice representatives

The Council would:

- evaluate emerging contaminants
- recommend new treatment technologies
- identify research priorities
- advise the Legislature
- recommend updates to drinking water standards
- publish a statewide innovation report every two years

Why

Science evolves quickly. Massachusetts should lead innovation—not react to crises.

Pillar 3: The Emerging Contaminants Initiative

PFAS will not be the last contaminant communities face.

What

Expand state monitoring and planning to include:

- PFAS
- perchlorate
- 1,4-dioxane
- microplastics
- pharmaceutical residues
- endocrine-disrupting compounds
- future contaminants identified through scientific review

Develop a statewide contaminant dashboard so communities can easily access current information.

Why

Building one permanent system is more effective than passing new legislation every time another contaminant is identified.

Pillar 4: Help Communities Build Modern Water Systems

Many communities know what needs to be done—they simply cannot afford it.

What

Expand state grants and low-interest financing for:

- PFAS treatment systems
- engineering and design
- pilot projects
- groundwater remediation
- source water protection
- regional water partnerships
- emergency drinking water supplies
- infrastructure modernization

Prioritize projects that reduce long-term costs for ratepayers.

Why

Safe drinking water should not depend on a community's tax base.

State partnership lowers costs while improving public health.

Pillar 5: Protect Groundwater Before It Reaches the Tap

The best way to lower treatment costs is preventing contamination in the first place.

What

Expand groundwater monitoring at:

- airports
- military facilities
- industrial properties
- landfills
- wastewater treatment facilities
- sludge application sites
- known contaminated properties

Strengthen groundwater cleanup standards where contamination threatens drinking water supplies.

Why

Cleaning contamination before it spreads is far less expensive than treating drinking water after contamination reaches public wells.

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Pillar 6: Support Private Well Owners

Nearly half a million Massachusetts residents rely on private wells.

What

Create grants and technical assistance for:

- well testing
- filtration systems
- emergency drinking water
- connecting homes to public water systems when appropriate

Prioritize assistance for low-income households.

Why

Everyone deserves access to safe drinking water, regardless of where they live.

Pillar 7: Protect Farms & Natural Resources

Following successful models in states like Maine, Massachusetts should help protect farms impacted by contamination.

What

Support:

- soil testing
- irrigation well testing
- livestock testing
- remediation planning
- technical assistance
- financial recovery when contamination results from historic practices

Why

Protecting farms protects local food production, rural economies, and public health.

Pillar 8: Hold Polluters Accountable

Taxpayers should not bear the full cost of contamination.

What

Strengthen the Commonwealth's authority to:

- recover cleanup costs

- recover treatment costs
- recover natural resource damages
- require long-term monitoring
- require responsible parties to provide alternative drinking water when necessary

Why

When possible, cleanup costs should be paid by those responsible—not local ratepayers.

Timeline

First 6 Months

- Establish the Massachusetts Water Quality Innovation Council.
- Convene the Safe Drinking Water Partnership.
- Identify statewide priorities for emerging contaminants.
- Develop a statewide drinking water and groundwater inventory.

6–12 Months

- Launch statewide contaminant dashboard.
- Expand municipal technical assistance.
- Begin competitive infrastructure grants and pilot projects.
- Publish first statewide emerging contaminants report.

Year 2

- Evaluate treatment outcomes.
- Expand successful municipal partnerships.
- Update contaminant priorities based on scientific review.
- Publish recommendations for future drinking water protections.

Outcomes

- Safer drinking water across Massachusetts.
- Earlier detection of contamination.
- Lower long-term infrastructure costs.
- Stronger groundwater protection.
- Greater support for municipalities.
- Reduced financial burden on local ratepayers.
- Better protection for private well owners.
- Continued leadership in drinking water innovation.

Why This Plan Works

- Builds on successful Massachusetts projects like the Abington–Rockland Joint Water Works.
- Prevents contamination instead of simply reacting to it.
- Supports municipalities before infrastructure failures become emergencies.
- Protects public health while lowering long-term costs.
- Creates one permanent framework capable of addressing today's contaminants and tomorrow's.
- Makes Massachusetts the national leader in clean drinking water innovation.

The Bottom Line

Safe drinking water is not just an environmental issue**—it is a public health issue, an infrastructure issue, and a quality-of-life issue.**

Massachusetts has already shown that communities can successfully eliminate PFAS contamination when they have the right tools and support. The next step is ensuring every city and town has access to those same opportunities.

By building on proven successes, investing in prevention, supporting local communities, and preparing for future contaminants, Massachusetts can create the nation's strongest clean drinking water program—**protecting families, strengthening communities, and ensuring safe water for generations to come.**