

AB 741 – SEPTIC & SEWER IMPROVEMENT FINANCING

Assemblymember Jared Huffman

IN BRIEF

AB 741 would expand existing law to allow property owners to voluntarily enter into agreements with local wastewater agencies to finance needed sewer improvements. This bill would:

- Help private property owners finance the cost of converting from a septic system to a community sewer system and the replacement or repair of damaged sewer laterals.
- Protect water quality, the environment and public health from contamination caused by leaking septic tanks, eroding pipes and other aging sewer infrastructure.

Many communities in California face threats from aging infrastructure. The conversion of septic systems to community sewer systems and the replacement or repair of damaged sewer laterals are needed to protect water quality, the environment, and public health and safety. AB 741 (Huffman) would provide additional flexibility to wastewater agencies and voluntary options for willing property owners for financing of sewer improvements.

Sewer Lateral Improvements

A sewer lateral is the pipe that transports wastewater from a building to the public sewer main in the street. Over time, laterals can become cracked, disjointed, or damaged by tree roots, earth settlement, and blockages caused by fats, oil, and grease, allowing wastewater to leak into the ground. Damaged laterals can also contribute to sewage blockages and backups and storm water overflows into the public system, as well as create harm to the environment and threaten public health.

The California State Water Resources Control Board requires wastewater agencies to maintain the public sewer systems, and agencies invest hundreds of millions of dollars in repair and improvements to publicly owned sewer mains and treatment

facilities. However, the problem cannot be resolved solely by upgrading the community sewer system. Repair or replacement of sewer laterals is typically the responsibility of the homeowner, but there is no mandate requiring this maintenance. Private property owners must be given the tools to maintain private sewer laterals.

The costs of sewer lateral replacements and repairs for private property owners are high. A typical sewer lateral replacement can range from \$1,500 to \$4,000. Costs can increase significantly if there are obstructions such as landscaping, driveways, or structures built above the lateral.

Providing financing options to encourage private property owners to replace or repair their damaged sewer laterals is essential to ensuring that public infrastructure, public health and the environment are protected.

Septic Conversions

Currently, there are a number of California communities that operate on septic systems. Septic systems can be operated safely, but when they age or exceed the treatment capacity of regional soils, they can leak and contaminate surface waters, groundwater and sensitive coastal waters with disease-causing pathogens and nitrates.

Converting from a septic to sewer system protects water quality, the environment and public health by ensuring that wastewater is collected and conveyed to treatment and disposal facilities with minimal risk and increases water quality benefits.

The cost to convert a septic system to a sewer system can be expensive, including the clean up and removal or abandonment of the septic system as well as the costs of building the facilities needed to connect to the community sewer system. According to the Irvine Ranch Water District, the costs of conversion can range from \$2,000 to \$14,000 and if new or replacement pumps are needed, this can add an additional \$10,000.

EXISTING LAW

Health & Safety Code sections 5460-5464 authorize a property owner included within an assessment district to enter into an agreement with the local wastewater agency for the financing of sewer improvements needed to connect to a community sewer system when a Regional Water Quality Control Board has issued an abatement order.

THIS BILL

AB 741 would authorize public wastewater agencies to offer voluntary liens to private property owners to finance lateral replacements and repair and conversions from septic to sewer systems to prevent groundwater contamination and protect water quality, the environment, public health and safety.

SUPPORT

Irvine Ranch Water District (sponsor)
North Bay Watershed Association (sponsor)
California Association of Sanitation Agencies
Association of California Water Agencies
California Special Districts Association
California Municipal Utility Association
County Supervisors Association of California
California Association of Realtors
County of Sonoma
City of San Diego
Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
Municipal Water District of Orange County
East Bay Municipal Utility District
Inland Empire Utilities Agency
Eastern Municipal Water District
Novato Sanitary District
Santa Margarita Water District
Three Valleys Water District
Cucamonga Valley Water District
Marin Builders
Engineering Contractors Association
California Fence Contractors
Sonoma County Water Agency
Sierra Club

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Paige Brokaw, (916) 319-2715
Paige.Brokaw@asm.ca.gov

Maureen O'Haren, (916) 498-1900
maureen@oharen.com