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Fast-tracked sales of public water to private companies OK'd by N.J. Assembly

By Seth Augenstein | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com



Sales of public water systems to private companies would be fast-tracked under a bill, approved by a divided state Assembly this afternoon. (AFP/Getty Images)

TRENTON — Public water systems could be sold to private companies without a public vote, under a bill approved today by the state Assembly.

The Water Infrastructure Protection Act was approved today, 45-24, with six abstentions. A state Senate version is pending.

The bill's sponsor, Assemblyman Lou Greenwald (D-Camden), offered the bill without comment to the rest of the body before the vote.

Proponents of the bill have said fast-tracking the sale of public water systems would get needed investment into aging infrastructure. State Sen. Paul Sarlo (D-Bergen), one of the sponsors, offered amendments earlier this month which he said "overhaul" the legislation, effectively narrowing the definition of what systems would qualify.

However, opponents including the state's Division of Rate Counsel, the New Jersey Sierra Club and other environmental groups, the New Jersey Business and Industry Association, the Communications Workers of America union, and the New Jersey State League of Municipalities were all united in their opposition at an Assembly committee hearing last week.

"It really has a single intention: to bypass voter intent," said Adam Liebtag, the CWA president, at the hearing.