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### Subcommittee on Minnesota Water Policy, July 15, 2020

#### **The Future of Minnesota Drinking Water--A Framework for Managing Risk**

##### **A summary with legislative recommendations for the subcommittee**

**Jim Stark**

This is a brief summary of a report prepared by staff and faculty from the University Of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs and the University of Minnesota's Water Resources Center. Funding was provided by the Minnesota Department of Health.

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#### **Introduction**

The purpose of the report is to identify opportunities for better managing risks to Minnesota's drinking water. This document is a summary that focuses on legislative recommendations in the report.

#### **Review of Results with Possible Legislative Actions Based on the Report**

Minnesota is recognized as having progressive drinking-water management. However, the future of safe drinking water is challenged by ever-increasing numbers of contaminants, a growing and shifting population, climate change, and aging infrastructure. The aging population in Greater Minnesota, shifts in population, and increasingly sophisticated and costly water treatment have all created financial challenges for communities. Consequently, advanced planning is considered to be a priority to ensure safe and sufficient drinking water while providing environmental protection. The University of Minnesota's report presents a framework for this planning effort. This document, by the Legislative Water Policy Subcommittee, is intended to briefly summarize parts of the report as they that relate to possible legislative action. The legislative recommendations in this document are based on my interpretation of the report

The report is detailed and can be assessed at the following link:

<https://www.wrc.umn.edu/future-minnesota-drinking-water>

**The UM report promotes a Governance Assessment Framework (framework) as a means for structuring a state water plan. The legislative actions highlighted below address the recommendations in the report in the opinion of the author of his memo. The report itself does not recommend specific legislation.**

1. **Improved Governance:** The report recommends the creation of a coordinating entity.

In my opinion, this could be accomplished by charging an interagency coordinating team to provide a plan and an annual report.

2. **Increase staffing for water utilities:** Legislation is needed to provide support for curriculum programs at colleges, to establish a professional accreditation program, and to provide tuition support. Legislation also could provide support and a process to efficiently allow consolidation of utilities in those areas of concern. Finally, legislation would be helpful in providing assistance that encourages cost-effectiveness measures, and alternative arrangements, for affordable water treatment and distribution systems, as well as means encouraging the sharing of staff between communities.
3. **Impacts of Climate Change:** Legislation should support and be based on priorities included in the Environmental Quality Board's State Water Plan.
4. **Aging infrastructure** (both drinking water and sewage) is a growing threat to the delivery of safe drinking water. Additional funding is needed to upgrade facilities through bonding and other programs.
5. **The Threat of Emerging Contaminants:** Because many emerging contaminants are not fully addressed at the federal level, it is important to prioritize and manage them in order to make sound decisions about optimizing treatment between the source and the tap. Pursuing the wrong contaminants could lead to costs without benefits and waste resources. The report recommends comparative risk assessments to assess the ever-increasing list of contaminants of emerging concern.
6. **Water Safety Planning:** Legislative direction is needed to steer the preparation of a prototype plan that would combine water supply plans, wellhead management plans, emergency response plans, existing treatment and distribution network diagrams, and best operating procedures. This support would help produce a plan template and to fund a pilot in several cities by enabling MDH to work with suppliers to explore the advantages of WSPs.
7. **Private and domestic wells:** The report recommends as a positive change in the statutory requirement for well testing during the transfer of properties with wells. This would protect buyers and send a signal that the quality of water from private wells needs to be addressed. Providing more readily available and accessible resources for owners to identify hazards associated with local aquifers, and wells of particular design and age, would also encourage them to develop their own cost-effective approach to water safety planning
8. **Citizen Engagement:** Legislative support is needed to encourage greater citizen engagement in advocating for improved drinking-water safety.