

ASSEMBLY SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON INFRASTRUCTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

STATEMENT TO ASSEMBLY, No. 3100

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MARCH 23, 2023

The Assembly Special Committee on Infrastructure and Natural Resources reports favorably and with committee amendments Assembly Bill No. 3100.

This bill, as amended by the committee, would provide for the establishment of a New Jersey Water Infrastructure Center (center) at a public or private institution of higher education designated by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The bill would require the DEP's designation to be made pursuant to a competitive selection process and not more than six months after the bill's effective date, and it would further require the center to commence its operations within one year after the bill's effective date.

The three-fold purpose of the center would be to: (1) identify and promote policy and management methods to facilitate the transformation of the State's water infrastructure systems, as necessary to ensure that these systems are effectively delivering quality drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater services at the lowest long-term cost; are providing all residents of every community in the State with quality, affordable, and clean drinking water; are adequately funded; are operating efficiently and remain in a state of good repair; and provide multiple benefits to their host communities, including, but not limited to, clean water and waterways, local jobs, flood and climate change resilience, economic growth, and healthier, safer neighborhoods; (2) collect and bring together cross-disciplinary data, applied research, and stakeholders to accelerate the development and implementation of effective water infrastructure policies, water resource management practices, and solutions to problems facing water utilities and system owners and operators; and (3) ensure that all stakeholders, including, but not limited to, consumers, local government officials, water infrastructure departments and utilities, policymakers, regulators, and advocates, have easy and transparent access to all available water-related data and metrics generated by the center.

The center would have the duty to: engage in critical analysis; provide relevant information to, and encourage cooperation among

stakeholders; and develop new strategies and solutions, as may be necessary to effectuate its purposes. The center would be required to provide, at a minimum, the following programs and services, to the extent feasible with available funds:

(1) a data collection and dissemination program that uses an accessible, up-to-date online data dashboard to provide stakeholders with water systems performance data, benchmarking data, data on Statewide trends in water usage and supply, and other relevant data and statistics relevant to water infrastructure, supply, utilities, or resource management in the State;

(2) an applied research program that provides and facilitates cross-disciplinary policy and management research and identifies cutting-edge, data-driven solutions to problems affecting State-level water policy development, water systems operators, and the design of water systems;

(3) a small grants program that provides financial assistance to institutions of higher education in the State, in order to enable those institutions to fund independent research related to the State's water supply, water infrastructure, or management of water resources;

(4) a stakeholder collaboration program that uses educational newsletters and group meetings to help foster a constructive dialogue among stakeholders on water-related issues; and

(5) a water service innovation program that facilitates active engagement and cooperation among, and the development and maintenance of connections and ongoing relationships between, institutions of higher education and water system owners and operators, planners, policymakers, regulators, and other relevant parties, for the purpose of encouraging and better enabling the collective development of new and innovative water management and infrastructure strategies and solutions.

The bill would appropriate \$5 million from the General Fund for the purposes of financing the establishment and operations of the center.

The bill would further authorize the center to seek additional funding, from State, federal, or other sources, as may be necessary to strengthen and expand the center's programming.

One year after the center is established, and annually thereafter, the center would be required to submit a written report, to the Governor and Legislature, describing: the programs the center has implemented and the activities it has undertaken; the actual and anticipated effects of those programs and activities on the State's water systems, drinking water supply, and water consumers; the center's priorities for the upcoming year; and the additional resources, if any, that the center needs to properly effectuate its mission. Each report would also be required to be published on the Internet websites of the DEP and of the institution of higher education that is hosting the center.

The bill would require the DEP to: (1) provide advice and assistance to guide the operations of the center; (2) provide relevant data and research assistance to the center, upon request; (3) identify topics of concern and research areas that should be addressed; and (4) identify, and provide for the center to implement, new programs, services, or activities, not already identified in the bill, which are related to water infrastructure, water resource management, or drinking water quality or supplies in the State.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

The committee amendments to the bill would:

(1) provide that the institution designated to host the New Jersey Water Infrastructure Center may be a public or private institution of higher education; and

(2) delete a list of specific entities with which the bill would authorize the New Jersey Water Infrastructure Center to consult.