

■ Next Steps

The Drought Bill is currently in the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources and the first hearing for the bill this session is Wednesday April 26, 2023. The Drought Bill has been circulating in the Massachusetts legislature since 2016 and each time the bill has been reported favorably but dies once it reaches the Ways and Means Committee.

The bill is well supported by legislators, advocates, and citizens alike, but there is a lack of momentum that prohibits the bill from getting passed in a timely manner. There is a lack of urgency surrounding the bill especially because Massachusetts is not experiencing a debilitating drought. Massachusetts is currently experiencing drought conditions near the southern and eastern regions, but since they are minor, there is little public concern. In the short term, there is no concern for these low level droughts, but this bill seeks to manage the long term effects that droughts will have on the state.

The most difficult aspect of this bill is that it is preventative in nature. Since there is no current emergency we can turn to in order to prove the necessity of the bill, most advocacy asks people to consider the future and the consequences of a broken drought management plan in the long term, which is unrelatable and intangible to most.

Between discussion with advocacy organizations and legislators, as well as the state of climate change having an effect on the nature of droughts in Massachusetts, it is clear that the Drought Bill needs to be passed before Massachusetts experiences a water emergency in the future. Therefore, a new call to action is required in order to get the bill passed this session.

Upon recommendation by the general counsel for Senator Moore, the next step is to push the bill's presenter, Senator Eldridge, to submit the bill as an amendment to the Transportation and Environmental Bond Bill. As an amendment to the bond bill, this bill would move quicker through the legislature as an amendment and push for support from legislators through a roll call.

After getting the bill submitted as an amendment to the bond bill, the next step would be to get more senators to sign onto the amendment, with the goal of getting at least half the senators to sign on their support. The Drought Bill currently is sponsored or co-sponsored by 9 senators, ...about ¼ of the Senate. Our goal would be to get at least a majority of the Senate to co-sponsor the amendment because that would make it harder for leadership to deny something with so much support.

■ Update:

As of June 26, 2023: There was a hearing for the bill in the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources on April 26, 2023.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.475: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S475

H.861: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H861

Organization or Coalition support:

Mass River Alliance: massriversalliance.org