

Bill: HB 19 – Drinking Water Utilities Amendments

Sponsor: Representative Jack

Floor Sponsor: Senator Balderree

UASD Position: Track and amend

This Bill addresses security at drinking water facilities.

Discussion: Representative Jack presented the Bill, explaining that it is intended to strengthen cybersecurity protections for Utah's drinking water systems. He noted that the state has approximately 1,200 public water systems with varying levels of cybersecurity preparedness and that there has been a growing number of cyberattacks aimed at destabilizing the economy by targeting critical infrastructure such as water system.

The Director of the Division of Drinking Water testified in support of the Bill, citing multiple incidents in which water systems have been targeted by cyberattacks. He explained that since 2018, water systems serving more than 3,300 individuals have been required to maintain a cybersecurity plan as part of their emergency response planning. Senator Stratton asked how many systems fall below the 3,300 individual threshold, and the Director responded that there are approximately 500 systems that fall below the current threshold. This Bill provides for additional resources and support for those water systems.

The sponsor and Director also discussed the provision requiring reporting of cybersecurity breaches within two hours. This timeframe was included in an effort to ensure the water systems have a rapid response, access to funding, and data recovery. The Bill includes requirements for annual cybersecurity training, which the Director stated is already developed and ready for implementation. Senator Hinkins spoke in support of the Bill but expressed concern about advancements in artificial intelligence and the potential for fraudulent communications to harm smaller water utilities. Representative Jack referenced his experience with cybersecurity training in the power industry and emphasized the volume of attacks faced by energy infrastructure.

Senator Stratton asked about the potential cost impacts on water systems and ratepayers. The sponsor responded that prioritizing cybersecurity would prevent far more costly disruptions and damage. The Director added that the financial and operational costs of responding to an attack and recovering from one far exceed the investment required to implement preventative cybersecurity measures.

Yeas: 5

Nays: 0

N/V: 2

Outcome: HB 19 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.
