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NYPIRG APPLAUDS, CRITICIZES, GOV HOCHUL'S APPROVALS AND VETO OF ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION

Governor Hochul approved five bills that will make public drinking water supplies safer, protect children against the risks of exposure to lead in school drinking water, reduce plastic waste, and help prevent agricultural greenhouse gases to fight climate change. Unfortunately, the governor vetoed legislation that would have banned the use of fracking waste as a roadway deicer, thereby missing an opportunity to reduce toxic runoff that pollutes drinking water supplies and surface waters.

S.1759-A/ A.126-A, approved. This bill closes a longstanding federal loophole that excludes public water systems serving fewer than 10,000 residents from having to test for emerging contaminants. By including a specific list of emerging contaminants that have already been detected in New York's larger public water supplies and giving a deadline for the New York Health Department to establish the list, this bill will ensure all New Yorkers know what's in their water.

Emerging contaminants are unregulated contaminants that EPA believes may have negative health consequences and are suspected to be in drinking water supplies. Through a recent analysis of EPA data, NYPIRG found that 176 water systems, impacting 16 million New Yorkers, detected one or more emerging contaminants. (You can review contaminants found in NYS's drinking water at <https://www.nypirg.org/whatsinmywater/>.) Every region in New York State has been impacted.

However, this is with limited data. Approximately 2,075 water systems, serving 2.4 million New Yorkers, have not had any emerging contaminant testing under the most recent federal emerging contaminant testing list.

The longer New York goes without statewide emerging contaminant testing, the longer residents remain in the dark about the quality of their water, and the greater the chances residents get exposed to unsafe levels of contaminants. Without this testing, New York is on a path to repeat what happened in Hoosick Falls. This legislation is critical to prevent such an outcome.

S.2122-A/A.160-B, approved. Lead is a neurotoxin that is particularly damaging to infants, toddlers, and young children. In addition to causing myriad health problems, lead exposure harms children's intellectual development and causes behavioral issues, interfering with their ability to focus and learn in school. Unfortunately, many public school buildings in New York have lead components in their plumbing systems resulting in children being exposed to lead in the school water used for drinking and food preparation. This legislation tightens testing requirements and standards pertaining to lead in school drinking water.

S.4722-A/ A.5386-A, approved. According to the world's leading climate scientists, in order to limit global warming to 1.50C, greenhouse gas emissions will have to be cut dramatically across all sectors. In order for New York State to achieve its critical climate goals and align with global climate science, cutting pollution from the agricultural sector will be a key component. This legislation would help accomplish this by enabling the Department of Agriculture to encourage soil health practices. Such practices will help store and draw carbon from the atmosphere, prevent erosion and flooding, and protect water quality.

The agricultural sector accounts for approximately 10% of the country's greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, the agricultural sector is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Adopting best practices to preserve soil health will be key to both cutting agricultural greenhouse gas emissions and protecting the future of farming.

S.543/A.5082, approved. New York must do everything in its power to reduce and eliminate plastic waste. Banning hotels from providing small plastic bottles that contain shampoos, conditioners, and more, is a small and simple step the State can take to further reduce plastic pollution.

According to a recent report, experts estimate that over eight million tons of plastic waste ends up in the world's oceans each year, and that amount is likely to increase dramatically over the next decade unless states and nations act. The average American throws out 185 pounds of plastic every year. Legislation similar to this proposal has been approved by California, and local jurisdictions such as Fulton County, Georgia.

S.4478/A.528, approved. By their very nature, pesticides are designed to have a biological impact. Consequently, pesticides have toxic effects not only on the plants and animals they are designed to control, but also on humans.

Infants and children are particularly sensitive to the toxic effects of pesticides for a variety of reasons: the liver and kidneys in infants are incapable of removing pesticides as well as adults, children take more breaths per minute increasing inhalation of pesticides, infants and children spend more time on the ground where pesticides are applied, and children are more likely to put various objects in their mouths.

As a result, there are numerous state and federal pesticide laws designed to prevent exposure to children and infants. The 1996 Food Quality Protection Act, which passed congress unanimously, requires the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to ban a pesticide if it can't be proven to be safe for children.

Under New York's State Education Law and Social Services Law, no school or day care center can apply pesticides to any playgrounds, turf, or athletic or playing fields. This legislation does the same for summer overnight and summer day camps. Camps often offer outdoor environments that include manicured lawns, playgrounds, and athletic fields. Children should be offered the same protections against pesticides at camps as they do at schools and day care facilities.

S.355/A.903, vetoed. This legislation would ban some of the most dangerous oil and gas waste from being any highway. Currently, oil and gas liquid wastes are permitted for deicing of roads for 33 different cities, towns, and private entities. Since 1988, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has issued 119 permits for road spreading of oil and gas waste, and the practice has primarily been permitted in central and western New York. Any waste generated through the extraction of oil or gas can contain a number of pollutants, such as toxic chemicals, metals, excess salts, and carcinogens like benzene and radioactive materials.

Using this waste on highways threatens water quality in New York – run-off from rain or snowmelt could lead to the dangerous constituents in the waste ending up in waterways or groundwater. NYPIRG will continue to push for legislation to ban this practice.