

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Bill 141 would ensure public is notified of sewage bypasses

I introduced a private members bill May 31, Bill 141 ? The Sewage Bypass Reporting Act, 2017.

Sewage bypasses occur when the capacity of a treatment plant is overwhelmed, usually by heavy rain. This causes untreated or partially treated sewage to be discharged into local waterways.

In 2006, the Ministry of Environment (MOE) estimated that the total volume of sewage dumped from Ontario sewage treatment plant bypasses was approximately 18 billion litres. Despite the MOE already requiring reports from municipalities on instances of sewage bypasses, that information is not readily available to the public. MOE reports that in 2006, more than 1,500 sewage bypasses and combined sewer overflows occurred. More recently, in June 2017, the Toronto Star reported that the City of Toronto was forced to dump 1.3 million cubic metres of partially treated sewage into Lake Ontario.

A local example occurred during the powerful thunderstorm June 22, which saw an incredible 105mm of rain record at the Credit Valley Conservation's weather station and flooding across Dufferin-Caledon. According to the Orangeville Banner, the Town of Orangeville was forced to bypass its Water Pollution Control Plant into the Credit River, though the majority of this wastewater was runoff and not domestic sewage.

Bill 141, if passed, will ensure that Ontarians know when untreated or partially treated sewage is bypassed into their local waterways. Bill 141 will require the Ministry to promptly publish when, where and why the discharge occurred and what the measured or estimated volume of the discharge was. Municipalities are already required to report instances of sewage bypasses to MOE's Regional Offices. However, there are inconsistent reporting practices across the province. For instance, in May 2017, Kingston unveiled a real-time overflow monitoring and notification website. The website shows the location of outflow pipes and reports when there is sewage discharging from those pipes. Bill 141 will alleviate this inconsistency and create a single standardized notification from the provincial government.

The intent behind Bill 141 is twofold. First, residents deserve to know as soon as possible when a sewage bypass has occurred, so they can make safe and educated decisions about how they use their local waterways. Secondly, the public can easily access information on our sewage systems, which will help residents understand the importance of investments in key infrastructure, like water treatment plants and sewage pipes, to their health and community.

Much like a hot weather advisory, if people are made aware, they will take steps to be safe. Simply put, Ontarians will want to know if there is untreated or partially treated sewage in the waterways that they swim, paddle, fish or boat in.

If you want to sign the petition in support of Bill 141 or get a copy of Bill 141, visit my website, www.sylviajonesmpp.ca

If you have any questions, please email sylvia.jonesqp@pc.ola.org

