

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Sewage Bypass Reporting Act needs to pass before election

Last year, I introduced a private members bill that would seek to address the issue of sewage bypassing in Ontario.

Sewage bypasses occur when the capacity of a treatment plant is overwhelmed, normally due to heavy rain, which causes untreated or partially treated sewage to discharge into local waterways. This is primarily done to protect homes and businesses from the sewage system backing up and basements flooding.

My proposed legislation, The Sewage Bypass Reporting Act, or Bill 141, if passed, would require the Ministry of Environment to publically report when and where a bypass occurs. The intent of the legislation is to provide residents information about when sewage bypasses occur, so they can make safe and educated decisions about how they use their local waterways. Second, the public reporting of sewage bypasses will help residents understand the importance of making the necessary investments in infrastructure, like sewage treatment plants and pipes.

It is important to note that municipalities must report instances of sewage bypasses to the Ministry of Environment, but it is the Ministry that has so far refused to make that information public. The Ministry seems to believe that municipalities could publically report sewage bypasses themselves. I disagree. There are 444 municipalities in the province of Ontario, including many small municipalities with limited staff. The Ministry already has the information and a centralized website which will make it easier for residents to access the information.

Since the introduction of Bill 141, I have received support from more than 50 municipalities and organizations across Ontario. I have learned through government data, obtained by my office, that in 2016, 6.5 billion litres of partially or untreated sewage was bypassed into Ontario waterways. Unfortunately, the Liberal government has so far refused to release the 2017 data. It is clear that the government does not want Ontarians to know how many sewage bypasses have occurred.

Over the last couple of weeks, we have had a significant amount of precipitation and flooding in Ontario. I know that heavy rain and flooding is heavily correlated with instances of sewage bypasses, because our sewers are simply overwhelmed. For example, the City of Toronto, which is one of the only municipalities that proactively reports instances of sewage bypasses, sent out notices via twitter Feb. 21 and 22 informing residents of bypasses at its Humber wastewater plant.

I am concerned that during the rain and flooding over the last few weeks there have been a significant number of sewage bypasses, but they have gone unreported to the residents of Ontario.

I am asking you to help me put pressure on the Ministry of Environment to make this necessary change to ensure there is transparency.

Visit my website www.sylviajonesmpp.ca to sign my petition calling on the Minister of Environment to make instances of sewage bypasses public.

