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## Stephens PFAS bill awaits Wolf's signature

By Chris Ullery

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Rep. Todd Stephens' bill could mean reimbursement to PFAS-affected residents while officials press military for clean-up costs.

A bill aimed at reimbursing PFAS-affected communities in Bucks and eastern Montgomery counties could be signed into law next week, state officials say.

House Bill 1410 from Rep. Todd Stephens, R-151 of Horsham, could use state tax dollars to pay for drinking water costs related to contamination linked to firefighting foams used at military bases in the area.

"Our ratepayers are bearing the costs of removing these contaminants even though this was a problem caused by the federal government," Stephens said in a news release this week.

"That is simply unfair," Stephens added.

The bill essentially creates two programs: a PennVEST funding source that could reimburse residents with PFAS contamination, and another specifically for areas near former military bases.

HB 1410 passed the House in a 144-54 vote in September, followed by a 42-7 Senate vote Monday.

Gov. Tom Wolf has endorsed the bill previously, according to the news release, and a spokesman from Wolf's office said the bill could be signed sometime next week.

Stephens said during a phone interview Tuesday the specifics on how the two programs would work will evolve over time.

The 16-page bill lays out the general rules for eligibility, but Stephens said the most important aspect of the bill is that it establishes a reimbursement for “past surcharges.”

Residents in Horsham, Warminster and Warrington have been footing the bill for water surcharges since testing showed levels of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances above a 70 parts per trillion health advisory limit set by the Environmental Protection Agency in 2016.

Comments from past public meetings included concerns that any level of PFAS should be considered unacceptable, prompting public water providers to seek bulk water purchases from “clean” water sources.

Higher water rates were an immediate consequence of those added purchases, but elected officials at all levels of government have been pressuring the military to eventually pay back residents.

Rather than residents waiting until a settlement is reached with the federal government, HB 1410 effectively lets the state repay those costs and use money from a future settlement with the U.S. government to recoup them.

“Our communities have been paying a hefty price for the removal of PFAS in their water and I am thrilled they will no longer have to fund the remediation process for safe, clean drinking water,” Rep. Meghan Schroeder, R-29, of Warminster, said in a separate news release.

Schroeder was referencing both her hometown’s military-related contamination as well as the Hartsville section of Warwick.

Nearly two miles from the former Naval Air Warfare Center Warminster, a facility that closed in the 1990s but is still undergoing cleanup, the source of PFAS in Hartsville is being disputed by the Navy.

The military has suggested the source of Hartsville’s contamination may have been the Hartsville Fire Co., but inconclusive soil tests near the station by the EPA have made that potential source unlikely.

If the military is ultimately found not to be the source of contamination in Hartsville, HB 1410 could still allow impacted residents some reimbursement for remediation efforts.

Stephens added he hoped the bill would effectively act as a template for other states dealing with their own PFAS problems.

A full copy of the bill can be found through [legis.state.pa.us](https://legis.state.pa.us).