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Chairperson

Committee on Environment, Revenue and Taxation, and Procurement

I MINA'TRENTAI SINGKO NA LIHESLATURAN GUÅHAN

35TH GUAM LEGISLATURE

PRESS RELEASE

Senator Perez Introduces Guam Safe Drinking Water Act; Overhaul Protects Public, Regains Local Control Over Island's Drinking Water

Guam, February 6, 2020 – Today, Senator Sabina Perez introduced Bill 283-35. Developed with the Guam Environmental Protection Agency (GEPA), the 125-page bill is a comprehensive overhaul of local regulations protecting Guam's drinking water. The measure closes regulatory gaps, updates and incorporates the Guam Lead Ban Act, and ultimately allows GEPA to regain the ability to directly cite violators.

“Our local regulations are decades out of date,” said Senator Perez. Safe drinking water laws in Guam Code Annotated have not been updated since 1977, and respective rules and regulations were last updated in 2005. In the intervening years, significant federal regulations have been adopted to protect the public and environment, yet Guam's laws have lagged behind.

“Because we lack modern safe drinking water laws, GEPA must rely on the federal government to protect our people,” said Senator Perez. Due to Guam's outdated laws, GEPA lacks “primacy” (primary enforcement authority) over the island's safe drinking water. Consequently, regulatory authority rests with the federal government; GEPA must refer violations to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) for action based on federal regulations, which is a lengthier and inefficient process.

“Because we must rely on the federal government, enforcement can take longer and be more difficult, and violators can go unpunished” said Senator Perez. “Our drinking water is our responsibility. It's time for Guam to reclaim leadership and hold violators accountable for endangering our island's drinking water,” she added.

The regulations incorporated into Bill 283-35 were developed in close collaboration with GEPA and its Board of Directors. “This was a collaborative project, and I thank GEPA for their expertise and months of hard work. I'm proud to help usher in a new era of safety for GEPA and our island,” said Senator Perez.

“In the past year, GEPA has found faucets and plumbing fixtures that were not certified as lead-free for sale in local stores,” said Senator Perez. “Lead exposure poses serious and deadly health effects,” she added. The unsafe fixtures were removed from circulation, but the process was onerous and lacked clear processes by which GEPA could force businesses to remove the inventory from Guam. “Bill 283-35 gives GEPA the ability to quickly penalize violators and force them to remove poisonous products from our island,” said Senator Perez.

“Bill 283-35 is ultimately about safety and responsibility. The bill protects the public and our environment from dangerous violators and enables GEPA to gain primary enforcement authority over our island's drinking water,” said Senator Perez.

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