

August 4, 2020

Vermont Secretary of State
Jim Condos
128 State St.
Montpelier, VT 05633-1101

Dear Mr. Condos,

The Richmond Water and Sewer Commission is submitting this letter in support of the employees of the Richmond Water Resources Department. It is our intention to bring to your attention the difficulties that our employees have been experiencing with the Office of Professional Regulation of the State of Vermont (OPR). As you are well aware employees in the water resources industry are mandated to obtain proper training and licenses in order to protect the public from incompetent or unethical practitioners. Further, these trainings and licenses allow our employees to advance in their careers. Currently OPR is falling short of delivering on these goals in a timely fashion and we have outlined specific instances below that we feel you should be made aware of.

OPR has been both less than communicative in its operations and subpar in its provided tools. Over the past year OPR has been difficult to communicate with, with multiple attempts at communication going un-responded to. This difficulty in communication has increased in severity over the past few months, during the COVID-19 health crisis.

In multiple cases, attempts to contact the state employee assigned to a profession have gone unanswered. When attempting to communicate via email, responses are only received after either the state employee's supervisor or another third party (often the Secretary of State) is copied on the correspondence. We feel that it is reasonable to expect a response from a profession's assigned contact within a few business days, but response times counted in weeks are common.

The available user portal borders on unusable. It is one of the least intuitive, least functional user interfaces currently seen by the members of OPR employed by the Town of Richmond. It often fails to save submitted documents, or crashes, or fails to log in when appropriate credentials are provided.

These various issues, while not of dangerous concern, present noteworthy obstacles to young professionals attempting to advance their careers in OPR regulated fields. Furthermore, it directly affects essential employees during the COVID-19 crisis, keeping them from obtaining the required licenses or renewals to continue to perform critical functions at water resources facilities. In addition, the current experience of young professionals attempting to becoming licensed is so bad that some are opting to leave the field entirely. In an industry that is desperately seeking to attract qualified employees, technical obstacles such as this need to be avoided at all costs.

Thank you for your time in hearing our concerns. It is our hope that by bringing these issues to your attention that the OPR will undergo some much needed changes and improvements to be able to better serve the water and wastewater industry. Please let us know if you need further information from us, we are happy to share our experiences and assist in a solution.

Sincerely,

The Richmond Water and Sewer Commissioners

Bard Hill

David Sander

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