

Bill to allow water customers to vote on fluoride fails in Senate committee

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Andy Anderson testified before a state Senate committee Tuesday regarding a bill that would have allowed people to vote on fluoridation of water, but he said the bill failed and won't make it to the Senate floor.

Senate Bill 299 was sponsored by state Sen. Bryan King (R-Green Forest). It had been introduced as a way to put the fluoridation issue before voters.

The original bill said that before a water district fluoridates water in the system, the district "shall hold an election of the qualified electors in the water district to determine whether or not the district shall fluoridate the water."

The original bill also said the election could be called by a majority of the district board members or by a petition signed by at least 35 percent of qualified voters in the district.

Earlier this month, the bill was amended to remove the "shall hold an election" provision to say water system customers "shall have the option to hold an election of qualified electors of the public water system" to decide on fluoridation.

The amendment still states a majority of the water system board could call the election, but it reduces the number of signatures on petitions calling the election from 35 to 10 percent of qualified electors.

Act 197 of 2011 required all water systems with more than 5,000 customers to add fluoride to the water.

Since that time, fluoride has been a point of contention among water customers who believe the adverse health affects of fluoride outweigh any good effects for dental health.

The Ozark Mountain Regional Public Water Authority, of which Anderson is chairman, filed suit against the state Health Department regarding the implementation of Act 197.



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The authority argued that it sells water to 18 water systems and none of those individual systems have 5,000 customers, so it should be excused from fluoridation requirements.

SB 299 was referred to the state Senate Committee on City, County and Local Affairs a couple of times, but the hearing on the bill was Tuesday.

Anderson said his argument for SB 299 had nothing to do with the effect of fluoride on the human body, but was about local control and rights of citizens to call an election before fluoridation begins.

“It’s that simple,” Anderson told the Daily Times.

Anderson said he was told he would have two minutes to address the committee, so he kept his remarks short and to the point, highlighting parts of the Constitution that allow the people to have rights over government intrusion.

But he said other speakers against SB 299 were allowed to speak much longer and told “the same lies they’ve told at other meetings I’ve been in.”

In the end, he said only committee Chair Alan Clark (R-Lonsdale) and Linda-Collins-Smith (R-Pocahontas) voted in favor of SB 299, while Vice-chair Uvalde Lindsey (D-Fayetteville), Jim Hendren (R-Gravette), Lance Eads (R-Springdale) and Will Bond (D-Little Rock) voted against it. Scott Flippo (R-Bull Shoals) and Stephanie Flowers (D-Pine Bluff) were absent. The bill needed five votes to make it to the full Senate.

Anderson said the committee’s action showed that people in power want to retain that power because they feel allowing the public to vote on fluoridation would kill the process.

The authority’s lawsuit against the Health Department is still pending and Anderson can only hope for the outcome now that SB 299 failed.

“I thought this would pass, at least make it to the Senate floor, and that would squelch the lawsuit,” Anderson said.