

A Cross-County Water Quality Data Sharing Grant Program

Senator Doug Jones

Background:

Whether related to storm water runoff, inadequate wastewater infrastructure, or other sources of pollution, water quality issues can have major, adverse impacts on public health and the environment in communities throughout the United States. In major coastal watersheds, in particular, these issues can lead to significant loss of revenue for communities that rely on tourism as an economic driver.

Innovative solutions to these water quality issues can be achieved at the local level, but not in the absence of comprehensive and publicly available data. Unfortunately, states and local entities face a number of issues in data collection and sharing. This poses a major barrier to progress in meeting water quality improvement goals.

To enable all stakeholders to effectively address water quality issues, states and local governments need the resources necessary to establish systems facilitating the open exchange of information on water quality across county lines. This would ensure states and local governments are better equipped to understand and analyze issues adversely impacting public health, the environment, and local economies. The open exchange of water quality data empowers local governments to find informed and effective solutions to the challenges they face.

The Legislation:

This legislation, which establishes no new federal mandates, would help states and local governments to facilitate better cross-county information sharing about water quality. With access to comprehensive data, local leaders will have the information they need to address water quality challenges that do not stop at county lines.

Specifically, this legislation would establish a pilot competitive grant program for states with local governments seeking improved inter-county data sharing on water quality, sources of water pollution, and water infrastructure. States could, for example, establish a website or data hub to exchange water quality data, or launch inter-county communications initiatives related to water quality.

Grants under the program will be available to states that have a coastal watershed with significant pollution levels, and that have counties with significant individual wastewater infrastructure deficits.