Summary of Testimony for May 13, 2008 Oversight Hearing on Reports of Pharmaceutical Contamination in Public Water Supplies

by Kyla Bennett, Ph.D., J.D.
New England PEER

- Pharmaceuticals and personal care products (PPCPs) are being found in surface waters, groundwater, and drinking water supplies.

- Many of these PPCPs, particularly the endocrine disrupting compounds (EDCs) were designed to impact the human body at very low doses.

- PPCPs and EDCs can adversely impact humans, particularly fetuses, the elderly, children, and the immuno-compromised. Moreover, the chronic ingestion of low doses of so many medicines may lead to synergistic adverse effects.

- PPCPs get into our drinking water primarily through wastewater treatment plant effluent.

- Wastewater treatment plants are neither designed nor intended to remove PPCPs from the water. Moreover, some treatment methods can break PPCPs down into more toxic "daughter compounds."

- Since PPCPs react differently to different treatment methods, there is likely no short-term treatment method that will remove the thousands of PPCPs from wastewater effluent.

- In Massachusetts, a study has shown that PPCPs can travel in groundwater up to a mile.

- Nursing homes, elderly housing, assisted living facilities, hospitals, and veterinary hospitals discharge more PPCPs than other types of development.

- The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection is actually making it easier for these types of facilities to be built in Zone IIs of municipal wells through the 40R process and through their new proposed groundwater discharge regulations.

- Since effective treatment for the many pharmaceuticals on the market is unavailable, the Commonwealth should work to prevent additional PPCPs from entering the water supplies. Specifically, the Commonwealth should prohibit the construction of nursing homes, hospitals, assisted living facilities, elderly housing, and veterinary hospitals near private drinking water wells or near Zone IIs of water supplies.