
Tuesday, April 28, 2026

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EGLÉ backs Schuette dam bill ahead of hearing

The Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy voiced support for a dam oversight bill headed to committee in the House tomorrow as state officials visited one such facility on Tuesday to discuss the state's role in safety and risk mitigation on dam projects.

[HB 5485](#), sponsored by [Rep. Bill Schuette](#), R-Midland, is scheduled for a hearing in the [House Natural Resources and Tourism Committee](#) on Wednesday. The bill contains a number of measures that would enhance the state's oversight role of dams and beef up regulations to ensure existing infrastructure is modernized and safe, which EGLÉ officials said is an important next step in the process of making dams less risky for those who live and own property nearby.

The bill would expand state oversight of dams and modernize regulations surrounding them to better protect communities in their vicinity from flooding and infrastructure failure; require dam owners to register their dams and have contingency plans for comprehensive safety, inspection and asset management; increase inspection frequency with the aim of identifying risks earlier and responding in a timely manner; raise design and safety standards to ensure dams better withstand extreme weather and climate conditions and create a dedicated emergency fund and grant program to address high-risk dams.

Schuette said he's looking forward to the bill's discussion before the committee given its topical nature both in his district and around the state, as mid-Michigan continues to deal with the aftermath of historical flooding in 2020 and Cheboygan County currently remains under a gubernatorial declaration of emergency due to the threat of overtopping at the Cheboygan Lock and Dam Complex.

"My district and mid-Michigan are prone to legacy flooding challenges, and this is an issue that impacts communities across the state. We don't know when another catastrophic flooding event is going to take place, but we can be prepared with policy that sees Michigan be proactive instead of reactive," Schuette said in a statement. "([HB 5485](#)) strengthens regulatory requirements for high and significant hazard dams, installs licensing requirements every 15 years for dams, increases inspections, puts financial responsibility on dam owners and requires them to update their Emergency Action Plans and more. It's a needed step forward for our state and helps ensure this critical infrastructure is safe for communities, residents and livelihoods."

EGLE [Director Phil Roos](#) said the legislation would be critical to continuing the work the state has done since the failure of the Edenville and Sanford dams in 2020, which resulted in catastrophic flooding and damage to the surrounding communities. \$44.5 million has been put into the state's Dam Risk Reduction Program since 2021, but it's estimated an additional \$1 billion is required to fully address the dam infrastructure upgrades required across the state.

"We have a solid foundation in place, and now we need to strengthen our tools that support dam safety," Roos said in a statement. "Proposed legislation builds on that progress by modernizing oversight, increasing accountability to ensure we can better safeguard people, infrastructure and our natural resources."

Between 2022 and 2025, the Dam Risk Reduction Program has funded 56 projects, including 20 dam removals, 16 rehabilitation efforts and 20 engineering studies, EGLE said.

– By Lily Guiney

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