

**Summary Fact Sheet  
Combined Sewer Overflow Variance Issuance  
Massachusetts Water Resources Authority and Cities of Cambridge and Somerville**

**Introduction:**

Older cities in the United States such as Boston and several surrounding cities, were designed to convey stormwater and sewage in the same pipes to wastewater treatment plants. However, the pipes could not convey all of the water during heavy rainstorms, and to avoid sewage backups into homes, these combined sewers included relief points known as combined sewer overflows (CSOs), where the pipes would overflow releasing untreated sewage into the environment. Reducing or eliminating these overflows is complicated and costly.

Since the 1990's, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) and the cities have worked to close these CSO structures and reduce how often and how much untreated or partially treated wastewater the remaining CSOs discharge.

In 1999, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) issued a temporary change in the State Surface Water Quality Standards (in the form of a Variance) to allow MWRA and the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville to exceed the water quality standards for bacteria in Alewife Brook and Upper Mystic River for a limited period of time while projects were designed and constructed to reduce or eliminate CSO discharges. The Variance has been renewed several times. The current Variance expires on August 30, 2024. Since there is still work to be done by MWRA and the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville, MassDEP has started the public process of renewing this Variance for up to five years.

**Public Participation and Comment:**

- MassDEP will be issuing a Tentative Determination to renew the Variance for up to five years. The public can submit comments within the 45-day comment period which begins on March 8, 2024 and ends on April 22, 2024.
- Information on how to review the Tentative Determination and technical fact sheet as well as how to register to attend the public hearings on March 28, 2024 can be found at [MassDEP's Public Hearing and Comment Webpage](#).
- Upon the close of the public comment period, MassDEP will review the comments received and issue a Final Determination.
- If you have questions or would like more information about the Variance renewal, please contact the MassDEP personnel listed below.

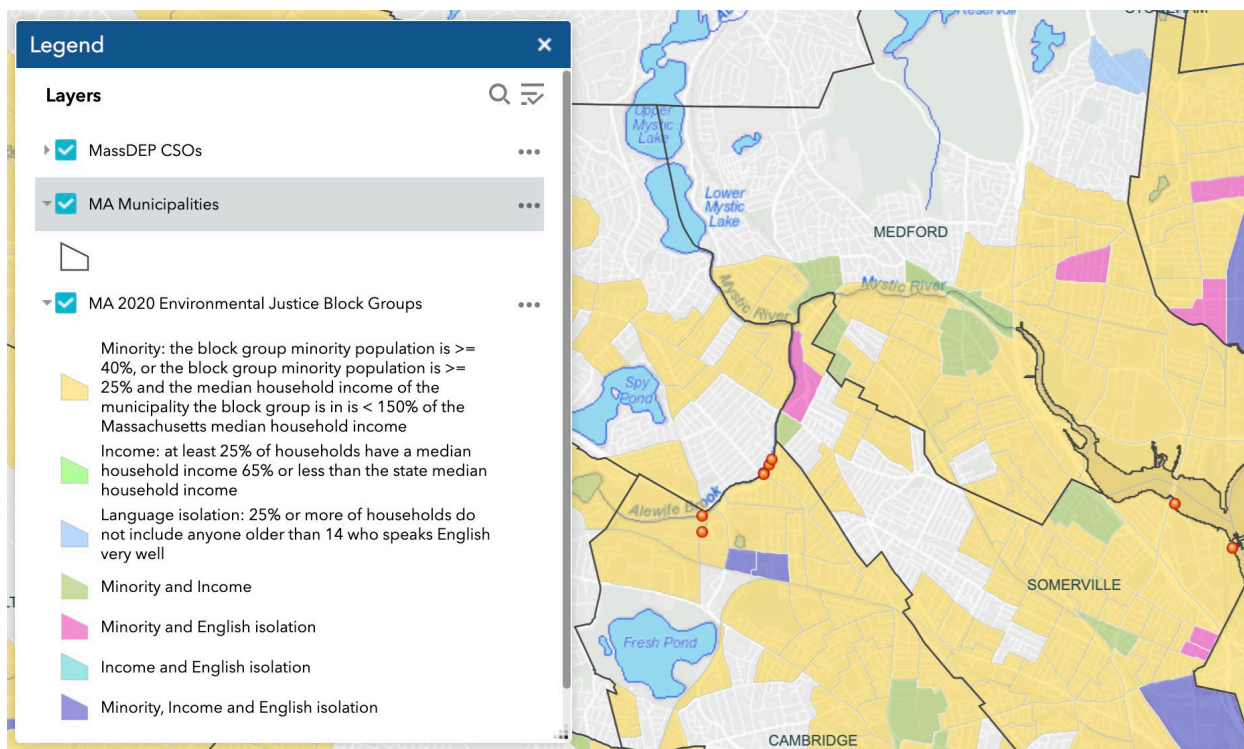
**Summary of Proposed Requirements for MWRA and the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville:**

- CSO discharges shall be limited as outlined in the Variance.
- MWRA shall continue their river water quality monitoring program and report annually to MassDEP and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
- By the end of 2024, MWRA shall submit a supplemental report to MassDEP and EPA on all 86 outfalls with a focus on the reported 16 non-compliant outfalls.
- Starting in 2025, MWRA and the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville shall submit Annual CSO Discharge Reports to MassDEP and EPA.

- MWRA and the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville shall submit their draft CSO Long Term Control Plans (LTCPs) by December 2025 and final plans by December 2026. The LTCPs will take into account climate change.
- By April 15 of each year, MWRA and the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville shall issue a joint press release which includes information on CSO locations, potential health risks from exposure to CSO events, and how to receive public notifications.
- MWRA and the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville shall comply with their respective MassDEP-approved CSO Public Notification Plans.
- MWRA and the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville shall continue to implement the federal Nine Minimum Controls for CSOs.
- MWRA and the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville shall implement a Pollutant Minimization Program, including further infiltration/inflow abatement work, and system optimization measures to further reduce CSO discharges.
- MWRA and the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville shall implement their Scopes and Schedules for updated CSO Long Term Control Plans (LTCPs) which were approved by MassDEP in July 2022.
- The draft CSO LTCPs shall be submitted to MassDEP and EPA for review by December 31, 2025.
- The final CSO LTCPs shall be submitted to the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act Office for review by January 31, 2027.

### EJ Populations:

This Variance covers CSOs that discharge to Alewife Brook and Upper Mystic River and are located in the EJ communities of Cambridge, Arlington, Somerville, Medford, and Everett. CSOs that discharge to Alewife Brook and Upper Mystic River and are owned by either MWRA, Cambridge, or Somerville are shown in the map below as red dots along Alewife Brook and Upper Mystic River.



These data were obtained from: [Massachusetts 2020 Environmental Justice Populations](#).

MWRA and the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville conduct periodic outreach to environmental groups and EJ communities regarding CSOs in Alewife Brook/Upper Mystic River. For more information go to: [Combined Sewer Overflow Control Planning Program - Joint efforts by Cambridge, MWRA, and Somerville](#).

**For More Information on this Variance:**

If you would like to be notified of the Tentative Determination to renew the CSO Variance for MWRA and the City of Cambridge as well as the public comment period, please contact Cathy Coniaris at [catherine.coniaris@mass.gov](mailto:catherine.coniaris@mass.gov) or 617-835-6693.

**Other contacts:**

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