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Michigan House of Representatives
State Capitol Building
Lansing, Michigan 48913

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Today I am returning to you House Bill 5095 without signature. HB 5095 directs the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to issue a permit to an oceangoing vessel if the applicant demonstrates compliance with the United States Coast Guard (USCG) regulations for ballast water management systems. The bill also allows the DEQ to continue to issue permits for vessels employing ballast water management systems that prevent the discharge of aquatic nuisance species, similar to current practice.

Ballast water is carried in tanks onboard vessels to improve stability and balance. It is generally taken onboard or discharged when cargo is unloaded or loaded on a vessel and is regularly discharged in a different port than which it was brought onboard. Ballast water often contains biological materials including plants, animals, and diseases that can be non-native or even invasive with the potential to harm Michigan's environment, economy, or human health.

The Great Lakes are Michigan's most precious resource and are invaluable to our State's economy. Our water resources are what many Michiganders appreciate most about our State. They are also vital for tourism as well as economic development; it is imperative that we protect them to the best of our capabilities and this continues to be one of my top priorities.

The language in the bill is ambiguous—at best—on the question of whether the DEQ would be required to issue discharge permits to certain vessels using "alternate management systems" approved by foreign administrations. I am of the mindset that there can be no ambiguity when it comes to the safety of our Great Lakes. These "alternate management systems" are not fully vetted by the USCG or the DEQ, meaning they may not be as protective as USCG or DEQ methods. Potentially increasing the risk for introduction of new aquatic invasive species into the Great Lakes, ultimately harming our waters and negatively impacting our State's economy, is not something I can support. For this reason, I am returning this bill without signature.

Sincerely,

Rick Snyder
Governor