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December 8, 2015

Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
Executive Chamber
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Re: Grant Funding for Water Infrastructure in the 2016-17 Enacted Budget

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to urge that you include at least \$800 million for water infrastructure projects in your SFY2016-17 budget proposal. Clean water infrastructure is critical to protecting public health and the environment, and a lynchpin for successful economic development statewide.

We thank you and the Legislature for working together to create the 2015 Water Infrastructure Improvement Act in the SFY2015-16 budget, allocating \$200 million in community grants over three years. This funding is providing an important boost to your economic development and climate resiliency efforts, while aiding communities who lack the resources to make these investments independently.

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has identified over \$36 billion in necessary wastewater infrastructure investments statewide. Additionally, the Department of Health (DOH) has identified over \$38 billion in drinking water infrastructure needs statewide over the next 20 years. DEC has also stated that at least \$1 billion must be invested by all levels of government annually to meet local sewer infrastructure needs alone. Communities across the state are doing their part to invest in their own drinking water and wastewater systems, but in many cases communities need help from the State to close the gap.

A well-maintained water infrastructure system is essential for protecting public health and the environment, and to bolster local economies. In many places all across New York, economic growth is hampered by a reliance on outdated wastewater technology and systems, which are severely degrading water resources and are not suitable for additional development. Our communities cannot thrive in the 21st century on 20th century water infrastructure. Municipal and business leaders recognize the difficulties that exist in attracting new development to our communities when local infrastructure is not reliable; people and businesses rightfully expect access to safe drinking water and clean waterways.

The Need is Great

Water infrastructure needs far exceed the amount of funding that has been made available. According to the Environmental Facility Corporation's (EFC's) 2016 Intended Use Plan for Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund, \$6 billion was listed for wastewater infrastructure projects, but only \$738 million is available in loan funds. Municipalities across the state are fortunate to have the EFC's programs to offer savings on their long-term interest payments; however, even with low cost financing many communities are struggling to implement improvements because of the debt they would incur.

Nearly every New York community is facing high infrastructure costs and, oftentimes, is spending scarce resources to repair their existing assets. These communities face considerable investments to upgrade old systems so that they may get into a position where they can shift more focus towards maintenance and operations. Moving from paying for repairs to paying for proper operations and maintenance is a necessary step if municipalities are going to get a handle on this growing problem, control costs and provide better value to their ratepayers and the environment. Many municipalities have – or are attempting to – implement “asset management approaches” for their infrastructure, but capital investments are needed to leverage these efforts.

Water main breaks and sewer overflows have been highlighted in the news across the state. Large water main breaks have temporarily closed businesses. Inadequate capacity in a sewer system can result in a business looking elsewhere to expand their operations. The reliability and resiliency of these systems is integral for economic growth and quality of life for New York State residents.

Furthermore, some communities in New York need to make a shift from outdated onsite systems such as traditional septic systems or cesspools to more advanced solutions for dealing with their wastewater. These may include sewerage in appropriate areas, community scale shared treatment systems, or advanced onsite systems that remove pollutants including nutrients from wastewater. Making these changes will protect water quality.

The costs on a community to single-handedly bear the financial burden of updating what is often a decades – if not century – old system is not viable. For example, the town of Henderson in Jefferson County decided to postpone its plans to build a wastewater treatment facility stating that the project was “simply not economically feasible at this point in time.” The requested financing for the Henderson project was listed by EFC as \$8.7 million. Henderson is by no means alone – this is just one example from the over six hundred wastewater treatment facilities that serve 1,610 municipalities and provide wastewater treatment to more than 15 million people

across New York State. Similar cases can be found for new systems and needed upgrades throughout the 9,500 public water systems in New York.

The benefits of investing in drinking water and wastewater infrastructure are clear. One of New York's greatest assets is water. As our climate changes and drought stricken regions seek out new opportunities, our water will be a top asset. Newer and bigger businesses will go where there is adequate water infrastructure capacity, and water infrastructure projects create jobs in and of themselves.

New York is once again looking at budget surplus, a favorable economic forecast, and has already received more than \$2 billion in additional settlement funds. Due to these positive financial developments, this is the time for increased investments in New York's water infrastructure. The future prosperity of New York's communities depends on your continued leadership. Thank you for considering our request for \$800 million for New York's clean water future.

Sincerely,

Kevin Chlad
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