

July 18, 2020

Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
U.S. Senate
478 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

RE: Support for federal clean water infrastructure funding

Dear Senator Gillibrand:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are writing to express our strong support for robust federal investments in clean water infrastructure. As the U.S. Senate considers COVID-19 relief packages, FY 21 appropriations, and long-term economic stimulus packages, our country has a unique opportunity to address the nation's clean water needs while helping to rebuild the economy.

As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused catastrophic damage to public health and our economy across New York and our nation. In addition to the thousands and thousands of lives lost, many residents are now facing unemployment and an economic recession that has hit our businesses and communities hard. As Congress takes actions aimed at reopening businesses and restarting our economy, we have the opportunity to *not* simply return to business-as-usual, but rather, to build back stronger, healthier, and more environmentally sustainable than ever. Wise investments made now will create good-paying jobs, revitalize local economies, and bolster low-income communities, while protecting public health and our environment.

New York's drinking water and wastewater infrastructure needs are significant, with an estimated \$80 billion in upgrades needed over the next 20 years. Our aging drinking water and sewage systems put our local economies, environment, and health at risk. Municipalities across America are struggling to provide residents with safe drinking water—this should be an unacceptable circumstance in the year 2020. In addition to longstanding problems like lead service lines that must be replaced, many communities face new challenges as they grapple with emerging contaminants, such as PFOA, PFOS, and 1,4-dioxane. Residents are witnessing the degradation of local water bodies through sewage overflows, harmful algal blooms, hypoxia, and other water quality impairments. As we work to recover from this pandemic, we must work to ensure that our health, environment, and economy are not threatened by unsafe drinking water, increased pollution, failing pipes, and beach closures.

Fixing our state's failing water infrastructure will put people to work and set the stage for economic revitalization in towns and cities across NY. According to a recent report by the Value of Water Campaign, meeting America's water infrastructure investment needs would create 1.3 million jobs—while protecting public health.

There are multiple opportunities for Congress to make significant progress, both short and long term, to advance clean water infrastructure investments in New York and across the nation:

- **COVID-19 Relief:** As the former epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, New York State and its local governments suffered tremendous economic losses that threaten to stifle new investments, including clean water infrastructure. New York's pandemic-related revenue shortfall could result in a \$61 billion multi-year budget deficit, causing New York State to hold back on funding to local governments. Without federal aid, these budget shortfalls threaten to undermine New York's recent momentum in upgrading wastewater and drinking water infrastructure. COVID-19 relief packages, such as the HEROES Act that passed in the U.S. House, would provide as much as one trillion dollars to offset losses incurred to state and local governments and include key protections for low-income customers including a shutoff moratorium and funding assistance during the COVID crisis. Our organizations support this federal relief to state and local governments to help ensure needed investments in water infrastructure are able to move forward.
- **FY 21 Federal Budget:** With the 2021 fiscal year set to commence on October 1, the annual appropriations process provides another opportunity to jump-start water infrastructure investments in New York. The FY 21 federal budget should provide increased funding for existing programs, including the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs, along with increased support for grants and nature-based, green infrastructure solutions. Although we believe additional funding will be needed, our organizations support the FY 21 House Interior-EPA funding bill that recently advanced out of the House appropriations committee because it includes:
 - **FY 21 Clean Water SRF:** FY 21 funding maintained at \$1.639 billion (minimum 10% subsidization and minimum 10% green infrastructure set-aside), along with additional emergency supplemental funding of \$6.355 billion (no state match requirements, minimum 40% for subsidization, and minimum 25% green infrastructure set-aside).
 - **FY 21 Drinking Water SRF:** FY21 funding maintained at \$1.126 billion (discretionary green infrastructure set-aside, and 14% in additional subsidization), along with additional emergency supplemental funding of \$3.855 billion (no state match requirement, minimum 40% for subsidization, and minimum 25% for green infrastructure set-aside).
- **Economic Stimulus/Infrastructure Package:** As Congress considers long-term efforts to rebuild America's infrastructure, water infrastructure must be a priority. Extensions of existing programs with increased authorizations, along with new programs needed to address longstanding issues such as lead service line removal and emerging clean water challenges (e.g. emerging contaminants such as PFAS and 1,4-dioxane in drinking water), will ensure that progress to rebuild our water infrastructure, protect drinking water, and support job creation and economic growth continue in the years ahead. To this end, the U.S. House recently passed The Moving Forward Act (H.R. 2). Our

organizations support key provisions in H.R. 2, including but not limited to, five-year authorizations that provide \$25 billion for the Drinking Water SRF and other programs to remove PFAS from drinking water, and \$40 billion for the Clean Water SRF and other programs to address clean water and drinking water affordability, efficiency, and stormwater runoff.

Thank you for your work to help citizens and businesses during this public health crisis—including passage of the CARES Act. As Congress considers options for economic stimulus packages and major investments in infrastructure to restart and rebuild our economy, we strongly urge you to invest in clean water. We need to not only create jobs and economic development, but also protect our environment and health.

Sincerely,

Kevin Chlad
Director of Government Relations
Adirondack Council

Patricia Cerro-Reehil
Executive Director
NY Water Environment Association, Inc.

Jill Jedlicka
Executive Director
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