

April 10, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer, Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

We are a group of 29 organizations greatly concerned about public health, public safety and environmental quality. We thank you for your ongoing efforts to protect the nation during this time of crisis, in particular the quick passage of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (the CARES Act), which directed immediate aid to the hardest hit sectors of our communities and the economy.

As you look forward to future stimulus legislative packages, we ask that you incorporate funding for water infrastructure-related programs that will both stimulate our nation's economy and improve water quality in our nation's waterways. Sound water infrastructure is critical for ensuring that the public has access to clean drinking water and reliable wastewater services, and that water pollution is minimized to the greatest extent possible. The EPA's Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey (2018), estimates that we need to invest over \$470 billion over the next 20 years to maintain and improve our antiquated systems. The Clean Watershed Needs Survey (2012), estimates an additional \$271 billion in wastewater and stormwater infrastructure needs. However, according to a study by IMPLAN (2015), if we made the necessary investments in our water infrastructure, it would result in over \$220 billion in total annual economic activity and generate and sustain about 1.3 million jobs over a 10-year period. In considering future significant infrastructure investments, we ask that all infrastructure funding programs prioritize resilient and nature-based solutions when applicable (such as restoring wetlands, building rain gardens, and installing permeable roads and sidewalks). In addition, we ask that all programs prioritize the needs of disadvantaged communities that have suffered the impacts of inadequate investments in the past, and that struggle to fund improvements in their local communities today. This would include ending water shutoffs during this crisis and securing funding for issues like lead line replacements.

We respectfully request that you incorporate the below legislation and program funding increases in the next stimulus package:

Incorporate Critical Existing Water Infrastructure Legislation

Stop Sewage Overflow Act (H.R. 2776)

Filed by Rep. Lori Trahan, this legislation increases the authorization of the Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grant program to \$500 million annually (used to award federal grants to states and municipalities for the planning, design, and construction for combined sewer overflows, sanitary sewer overflows, or stormwater management), extends the authorization of the program through 2030, prioritizes communities that have endured the most sewage overflows, and raises the federal cost-share based upon a community's ability to fund improvements. This legislation is endorsed by the American Society of Civil Engineers, National Association of Clean Water Agencies, American Public Works Association, and Plumbing Manufacturers International.

The Water Affordability, Transparency, Equity and Reliability (WATER) Act (H.R. 1417)

Filed by Rep. Brenda Lawrence, this legislation establishes a new federal water trust fund, financed by an increase in the corporate income tax, while also making several reforms to the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds. This legislation would improve our water infrastructure, make services more affordable for the public and stimulate the economy by creating an estimated 1 million jobs across the country.

Expand Existing Infrastructure Program Funding to Protect Public Health, Improve Water Quality and Ensure Job Creation

Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds

\$175 billion over five years for Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (SRFs), split evenly between the two SRFs, with at least 20 percent of funding distributed to disadvantaged communities as additional subsidization (grants) rather than loans. Many public water systems anticipate significant revenue losses as closed businesses and out-of-work employees are unable to pay water bills. Critical infrastructure improvements that promote water conservation and reduce water pollution may be delayed due to lost revenues. The economic impact of COVID-19 on ratepayers and water utilities could extend for many months or even years ahead. The National Association of Clean Water Agencies estimates that the pandemic will cost at least \$12.5 billion in lost revenue in 2020 due in part to household inability to pay and the direct costs of forgiving debt and restoring service. Funds will be needed to more readily assist water systems at a time when revenues are dropping dramatically. Providing robust funding for the State Revolving Loan Fund has the potential to create thousands of new, domestic jobs in the green infrastructure and wastewater sectors and reduce the cost of constructing and maintaining that infrastructure, promote energy efficiency and water efficiency, and reduce the potential long-term operation and maintenance costs of publicly owned treatment works facilities.

EPA Environmental Justice Small Grants Program

\$6 billion per year and increase grant size to \$500,000 for the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Environmental Justice Small Grants Program to provide grants to communities to address environmental risks associated with high concentrations of pollution,

to prepare for the effects of climate change, and to improve public health. Given the disproportionate exposure to high levels of pollution, climate change effects, and other impacts of historic economic and racial inequality, these grants provide critical resources to low-income communities, Tribal and indigenous communities, and communities of color to improve community health and support job creation.

USDA Water & Waste Disposal Loan & Grant Program

\$1.75 billion per year, including \$750 million in grants, for the USDA's Water & Waste Disposal Loan & Grant Program. This program funds construction and improvements for drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater systems for rural households and businesses and Tribes, and will provide the clean water these communities, spur economic activity and create jobs.

Clean Water Act Section 319 Nonpoint Source Management Program

\$200 million per year for Clean Water Act Section 319 Nonpoint Source Management Program, which assists states in watershed preservation and restoration and has successfully helped improve water quality across the country. Under Section 319, states, territories and tribes receive grant money that supports a wide variety of activities including technical assistance, financial assistance, education, training, technology transfer, demonstration projects and monitoring to assess the success of specific nonpoint source implementation projects.

EPA Wetlands Program Development Grants

\$20 million per year for EPA's Wetlands Program Development Grants, targeted specifically for wetlands restoration and rebuilding to protect communities against flooding and other natural disasters and filter drinking water, while also creating jobs.

FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities

\$8.7 billion over five years for FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, which will fund non-structural flood mitigation projects and resilient infrastructure. Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) will support states, local communities, tribes and territories, as they undertake hazard mitigation projects reducing the risks they face from disasters and natural hazards.

USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program

\$7 billion per year by 2024 for the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program, including \$200 million/year for Conservation Innovation Grants. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conservation of ground and surface water, increased soil health and reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, improved or new wildlife habitat, and mitigation against increasing weather volatility.

As Congress looks to future legislation to address the public health and economic challenges created by COVID-19, we respectfully ask that you incorporate the above requests.

Investments in our nation's water infrastructure and water resources will allow us to build a stronger economy, create jobs, protect public health, and create truly resilient communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Gabby Queenan
Policy Director
Massachusetts Rivers Alliance

Marlene Middleton
President
Hoosic River Revival

Laura Jasinski
Executive Director
Charles River Conservancy

Ursula Lyons
Member and Former Vice-President
Hop Brook Protection Association

Emily Norton
Executive Director
Charles River Watershed Association

Wayne Castonguay
Executive Director
Ipswich River Watershed Association

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Matthew Thorne
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Lexi Dewey
Director
Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee

Jonathan Stone
Executive Director
Save the Bay

Karen Lachmayr, Ph.D.
Chair
Wastewater Advisory Committee (WAC) of
the Massachusetts Water Resources
Authority (MWRA)

cc: The Honorable Richard Shelby, Chairman, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Nita Lowey, Chairman, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Kay Granger, Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of
Representatives
The Honorable Elizabeth Warren, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Edward Markey, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Richard Neal, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable James McGovern, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Lori Trahan, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Joseph Kennedy III, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Katherine Clark, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Seth Moulton, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Ayanna Pressley, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Stephen Lynch, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable William Keating, U.S. House of Representatives