ASSOCIATION OF METROPOLITAN WATER AGENCIES

February 20, 2013

The Honorable Henry Waxman
Co-Chair
Bicameral Task Force on Climate Change
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
Co-Chair
Bicameral Task Force on Climate Change
United States Senate

Dear Congressman Waxman and Senator Whitehouse:

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on how the federal government can best respond to the impacts of global climate change, particularly as it relates to the water sector. We appreciate your interest in advancing sound federal policies to address this complex and urgent issue.

The Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA) comprises the nation's largest publicly owned drinking water utilities. Our members serve clean and safe drinking water to over 130 million people from Alaska to Puerto Rico. As you can imagine, these utilities in every corner of the country are facing a variety of impacts related to global climate change. These range from drought and increased forest fires, to more intense storms, floods and sea level rise, to rising water temperatures that can lead to excessive algae growth and eutrophication in reservoirs. In light of these changing conditions, communities must begin planning now to align their available drinking water sources with their long-term water quality and quantity needs.

Because the impacts of global climate change will vary widely from region to region, water utility managers require region-specific climate information and monitoring data that illustrate changes that are already occurring, as well as advanced models that forecast what additional changes will come with time, and what they will mean for their communities and their water supplies. Without reliable information, water utilities cannot make informed decisions on how to invest their limited budgetary resources and communities will be put at risk of losing adequate water service if changing hydrological conditions reduce the availability of drinking water or significantly damage infrastructure.

To help communities prepare, AMWA's membership has agreed that a comprehensive, coordinated federal research program is necessary to develop decision support tools, adaptation and mitigation strategies, and to help local

utility managers access better information on the regional impacts of climate change. Although climate forecasting has made great strides over the past decade, updated and refined regional projections are still urgently needed to help water utilities accurately plan for the next 20 to 50 years. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and other federal departments and agencies currently conducting climate change research must continue to receive the necessary funding to conduct monitoring, refine regional modeling systems and make accurate projections of freshwater quality and quantity changes due to climate change.

While more targeted monitoring and research is necessary to pinpoint the threats posed by global climate change to the nation's water systems, it must be accompanied by additional federal resources to aid local communities in their responses to these new threats. Communities will not be able to do this on their own; early estimates by AMWA and the National Association of Clean Water Agencies suggest that the nation's drinking water and wastewater utilities may have to spend amounts approaching $1 trillion over forty years to adapt their infrastructure to severe drought, more frequent hurricanes and floods, and rising sea levels. This number is in addition to the hundreds of billions of dollars that communities will have to spend just to keep their existing infrastructure in working order.

Meanwhile, as climate change impacts communities and their water supplies, water utility managers will have to continue their compliance with a variety of state and federal regulatory mandates. The federal government should explore whether any existing regulatory mandates conflict with long-term carbon reduction or infrastructure adaptation goals, and then adjust accordingly. These regulatory revisions would also offer an excellent opportunity to educate the general public about the far-reaching impacts of global climate change.

In the legislative arena, AMWA supports legislation specifically designed to aid water and wastewater utilities prepare for and adapt to the impacts of global climate change, and which was recently introduced in the House of Representatives as H.R. 765.

Sponsored by Rep. Lois Capps, the "Water Infrastructure Resiliency and Sustainability Act" (or WIRSA) represents a strong step toward helping local water and wastewater utilities adapt their infrastructure to the impacts of changing hydrological conditions while continuing to provide consistent water service to their customers. The legislation proposes to offer competitive matching funds to help the nation's drinking water, wastewater and stormwater agencies undertake projects to build infrastructure resiliency to extreme weather events and other impacts influenced by global climate change.

Eligible WIRSA projects will include efforts to conserve water or increase efficiency in its use, preserve or improve water quality, rebuild or relocate threatened infrastructure, protect source waters and ecosystems, and implement technologies for water reuse and recycling. Local water utilities will also be able to use funding assistance to increase their use of renewable energy, conduct local-level analyses of future water resource challenges, or develop innovative adaptation approaches that may serve as models for other communities.

In sum, WIRSA will encourage communities across the country to build resiliency into their infrastructure today, and will help ensure uninterrupted water and wastewater service for decades to come.

AMWA worked with Rep. Capps to develop H.R. 765, and we are currently cooperating with Sen. Ben Cardin of Maryland on a Senate version of the bill. We strongly encourage you, as co-chairs of the Bicameral Task Force on Climate Change, to endorse this legislation and encourage your colleagues in the House and Senate to do the same. Building strong support for a measure to increase the resilience of America's water and wastewater infrastructure, we believe, could represent an important first step toward spurring discussions on more wide-ranging climate change legislation.

In addition to WIRSA, a comprehensive national climate adaptation plan should also examine other existing and proposed water infrastructure funding programs – such as the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds, or the proposed Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act – to ensure that they offer meaningful opportunities to fund infrastructure adaptation planning, operational changes and capital projects. The adaptation needs of the nation's water systems require support from a range of infrastructure programs.

Thank you again for soliciting our feedback on this very important topic, and we look forward to working with you to help the nation's water systems build resilience to climate-related challenges. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you should have any questions.

Sincerely,

Diane VanDe Hei
Executive Director