

Drinking water resilience program would expand under Senate proposal

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A nascent EPA grant program intended to help water systems adapt their infrastructure to the effects of extreme weather and climate change would dramatically expand under bipartisan legislation introduced in the Senate on October 17 and endorsed by an AMWA-led coalition of water sector organizations.

Sponsored by Sens. Ben Cardin (D-Md.) and Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.), the Clean Water Infrastructure Resilience and Sustainability Act (S. 2636) would build on the Drinking Water System Infrastructure Resilience and Sustainability program that Congress enacted last year as part of a larger water resources bill. That program was the result of years of effort by AMWA and others to encourage Congress to help communities prepare their water and wastewater infrastructure for the effects of extreme weather and climate change. However, as passed by Congress the program was limited to drinking water systems serving disadvantaged communities, or communities of fewer than 10,000 people. Lawmakers in 2018 authorized spending up to \$8 million over two years on the program, and it is expected to receive its first appropriation in the 2020 fiscal year.

S. 2636 would fulfill the original vision of the program in several ways. First, it would expand eligibility for the existing drinking water resilience program to community water systems of all sizes. Second, it would establish a similar resilience and sustainability program for wastewater infrastructure. Finally, it would authorize each program at \$5 million per year through 2024.

AMWA and nine other water sector organizations wrote to Sens. Cardin and Capito to express support for the bill upon its introduction. The letter said, “the legislation will urge communities across the country to build resilience into their infrastructure today, while helping ensure uninterrupted water and wastewater service for decades to come.”

Sens. Cardin and Capito introduced S. 2636 with the hope of adding it to larger water resources legislation that Congress is expected to consider next year. Their proposal also has support in the House of Representatives; legislation to create a wastewater version of the program was introduced in May, and AMWA is working with congressional staff to develop a companion House bill that would expand eligibility for the existing drinking water program.

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