



January 31, 2022

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Speaker Pelosi:

As Congress prepares to finalize legislation to advance President Biden’s Build Back Better (BBB) agenda, the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA) writes to express its strong support for provisions included in the House-passed Build Back Better Act (H.R. 5376) that would invest in the nation’s water infrastructure while advancing critical environmental and social justice priorities. We strongly encourage you to include these important provisions in any final BBB agreement.

AMWA represents the nation’s largest publicly owned drinking water systems, and our members collectively serve clean and safe drinking water to more than 156 million Americans in cities from coast to coast. Some of the biggest challenges facing our sector involve protecting public health, adapting to climate change, and providing affordable water service, so we were pleased that the House-passed BBB legislation included provisions to address each of these priorities.

For example, the legislation includes \$9 billion for EPA grants to address lead in drinking water through programs focused on lead service line replacements and removing outdated drinking water fountains in schools. Coming in addition to the \$15 billion over five years for lead service line replacement projects that was funded through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), these additional dollars will provide an opportunity to make significant progress toward the President’s goal of eliminating lead service lines – especially in low-income communities in need of the most assistance.

H.R. 5376 would also address the critical issue of water affordability. Ensuring access to safe drinking water is essential to achieving equity and social justice for all Americans, but today the cost of basic water service poses a challenge to many low-income households. The bill therefore includes \$225 million to jumpstart a program of new EPA grants to reduce the water rates and arrearages of low-income households. This assistance will ensure continued water service for vulnerable households while also providing communities with the funding they need to maintain their vital water infrastructure. It must have a place in the final BBB agreement.

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The House-passed bill would also take steps to ensure water availability in the face of extreme drought and other threats linked to climate change. The bill includes \$100 million for the Bureau of Reclamation to support large-scale water reuse projects, with grant funding to be made available to cover up to 25 percent of the cost of an eligible project costing more than \$500 million. Another \$550 million would be appropriated for projects in Reclamation states that help communities or households that lack reliable access to potable water supplies.

While it is essential that each of these provisions from the House-passed BBB legislation be included in the final agreement, Congress should also use this opportunity to advance other water-related environmental and social justice objectives. For example, last year's IJA authorized a pair of new EPA grant programs intended to help drinking water and wastewater systems build resilience to challenges associated with climate change and cyberattacks. The final BBB agreement should take the opportunity to appropriate funding to make these programs operational as soon as possible.

Thank you again for your leadership in crafting legislation that strengthens our water systems while addressing social justice and climate resilience priorities. We look forward to offering our assistance to ensure that these critical provisions are maintained in the final version of Build Back Better legislation.

Sincerely,



Diane VanDe Hei
Chief Executive Officer