



**ASSOCIATION OF
METROPOLITAN
WATER AGENCIES**

LEADERS IN WATER

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March 23, 2021

The Honorable Tom Carper
Chairman
Committee on Environment and
Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment and
Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Capito:

The Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA) is pleased to express its support for the Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act of 2021. This legislation reauthorizes a host of important water infrastructure programs, while also undertaking several new initiatives that will help communities and ratepayers address daunting challenges in the years ahead.

Earlier this month we wrote to the committee to say that any comprehensive water infrastructure legislation put forward this year must reauthorize critical programs like the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF), the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program, and Reducing Lead in Drinking Water Grants. We are appreciative that the legislation achieves each of these priorities, while also streamlining the WIFIA program by reducing from two to one the number of final rating opinion letters that must be submitted by applicants and setting clear guidelines for determining whether a WIFIA project is considered to be a non-federal project.

Perhaps most notably, AMWA strongly applauds the bill's five-year reauthorization of EPA's Drinking Water System Infrastructure Resilience and Sustainability Program, and the creation of a similar Midsize and Large Drinking Water System Infrastructure Resilience and Sustainability Program. Congress created the original program in 2018 as EPA's only authorized initiative dedicated to helping community water systems prepare their infrastructure to withstand the effects of climate change and extreme weather, and this new legislation ensures this objective will continue to be a high priority. Moreover, the creation of the companion program for midsize and large drinking water systems – as well as a similar program under the Clean Water Act to support the resilience of the nation's wastewater systems – recognizes that climate change and extreme weather will pose challenges to water systems of all sizes. We are grateful to the sponsors of the legislation for supporting equitable access to this resilience assistance funding for all of the nation's water systems that serve a diverse array of communities.

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Finally, AMWA welcomes language added to the legislation's substitute amendment that would establish a new EPA pilot program dedicated to helping low-income individuals remain up to date on their water and wastewater bills. Informed by a low-income water customer needs assessment that would also be called for by the legislation, this new pilot program would build on progress made through Congress' recent COVID-19 response legislation, which provided a total of more than \$1.1 billion to help low-income families across the nation catch up on past due water charges and benefit from water rate assistance during the pandemic. While the scope of the proposed pilot program is much more limited than the temporary assistance program funded through the COVID-19 legislation, it is nevertheless a meaningful starting point for a low-income water ratepayer assistance initiative that we hope will grow to be a permanent component of the federal safety net.

As the Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act of 2021 continues to be refined in the weeks ahead, AMWA hopes to work with you to clarify several other components of the legislation. These include the types of "cybersecurity vulnerabilities" that may be addressed through resilience program funding, the kind of lead reduction projects that are eligible for assistance under the new Lead Inventorying Utilization Grant Pilot Program, and whether community water systems are eligible to receive funding through EPA's Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Program.

Again, AMWA is pleased to support the Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act of 2021. We look forward to its prompt approval by the Environment and Public Works Committee, and we hope to continue to work with you to address the range of challenges facing the nation's water systems.

Sincerely,



Diane VanDe Hei
Chief Executive Officer