



February 6, 2019

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves
Ranking Member, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC, 20515

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, I write to thank you for holding a hearing on the impacts of not investing in our nation's infrastructure. We appreciate the committee making this a priority and urge you to continue looking at ways to fix our drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure. We support action for fixing our drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater water infrastructure.

Communities across the Great Lakes region continue to grapple with crumbling, antiquated drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. A staggering \$179 billion over the next 20 years is needed in improvements, upgrades, and repairs in the eight-state region of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York. Federal programs provide much-needed funding to help communities meet their clean water goals.

Congressional investment is vital, so people in the Great Lakes do not foot the entire bill for these expensive, but necessary, water infrastructure upgrades. From 2010 to 2017, water costs increased 41 percent across the country. While water rates rise for consumers, federal funding for water infrastructure has dropped significantly since 1977. According to the U.S. Water Alliance, in that year investments from the federal government made up 63 percent of total spending on water infrastructure. By 2014, the federal government's contribution dropped to 9 percent.

Some communities simply cannot afford to bear the full weight of financing these expensive upgrades. Higher water rates, which are frequently a solution to covering infrastructure improvements at the local level, do not work for families that already cannot pay their water bills and face water shutoffs that jeopardize their health and the health of their children. Many communities, like Flint and Milwaukee, are living with lead in their drinking water, while other urban and rural communities are facing polluted farm runoff that contaminates ground water. The cost of not fixing our water infrastructure is being borne right now by people in communities around the Great Lakes.

The federal government can help, which is why we support Congress passing an infrastructure bill that includes robust support for fixing our region's drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure. We ask Congress to:

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- At least triple the funding for wastewater and stormwater improvements through the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds, to at least \$5.1 billion and at least \$3.5 billion respectively.
- Ensure that infrastructure funding supports nature-based solutions such as restoring wetlands, building rain gardens, and installing permeable roads and sidewalks—solutions that prevent problems before they become more serious, while enhancing climate resilience.
- Incorporate measures to ensure people can afford their water, such as providing more flexible financing options like grants for disadvantaged communities; supporting and creating programs like those in last year’s Low Income Sewer and Water Assistance Program Act that help low-income households pay their water bills; providing incentives for utilities to adopt more equitable water and sewer rate structures; and ensuring funding is invested in communities in ways that empower and build those communities through job training and long-term employment.
- Preserve and strengthen source water protections that also help reduce runoff, support fish and wildlife, and provide recreational opportunities.
- Ensure that infrastructure legislation does not undermine or weaken environmental protections.

Investments in our region are paying off but there is much more to be done. The federal government needs to be a partner with our communities to help them meet their clean water goals. We have solutions; it is time to use them. Delay will only make the problems worse and costlier to solve.

Thank you again for your hearing highlighting an issue that affects the drinking water for 35 million Americans in the Great Lakes region. If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 454-3385 or clord@npca.org.

Sincerely,

Chad Lord
Policy Director