



March 4, 2018

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

Dear Chairman DeFazio:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, I write to offer our Coalition's support for the Water Quality Protection and Job Creation Act of 2019.

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.

This bill helps address that backlog by more than doubling the current funding available to the Clean Water State Revolving Fund. It also provides increased support for state pollution control agencies, watershed pilot projects, alternative water source pilot projects, and the Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grant program. The investment offered in this bill 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 introduction of this bill adds to the much-needed debate this year on how to address our nation's massive water infrastructure backlog. We urge additional priorities also be addressed as this bill moves through the legislative process:

- Increase the authorized funding for wastewater and stormwater improvements through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund to more closely match the need.
- Ensure that infrastructure funding prioritizes nature-based solutions such as restoring wetlands, building rain gardens, and installing permeable roads and sidewalks.

- 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.

We are pleased to offer our support for this much-needed bill. If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 454-3385 or clord@npca.org.

Sincerely,

Chad Lord
Policy Director

Cc: The Honorable Grace Napolitano
The Honorable Don Young
The Honorable John Katko