



November 18, 2020

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, I write to thank you for your efforts advocating for the Great Lakes and our communities throughout the 116th Congress. In the weeks ahead, the Senate will reconvene to finish its work. We urge you and your colleagues ensure that legislative efforts to protect our drinking water, restore our Great Lakes, and bolster our economy are top of mind and are signed into law prior to the end of the session. In particular, the Coalition calls on the Congress to:

1. Prioritize COVID-19 Relief and Clean Water Access

Accessing safe, affordable water is a challenge for too many people in the Great Lakes region. Yet, despite the coronavirus response packages passed so far, no provisions have been included to provide clean water to those who lack it. As Congress continues to respond to the coronavirus crisis facing our nation, we urge you to ensure that future responses help those that need it most today.

The Coalition calls on Congress to [end water shutoffs and safely restore water](#) to each household for the duration of this crisis and provide assistance to households and utilities to continue to safely provide water service in these difficult times.

2. Support Our Great Lakes and Communities in FY2021 Appropriations

The FY2021 appropriations process continues with a funding deadline on Dec. 11 drawing nearer. Our region relies on the support of the federal government to provide clean and affordable water, protect and restore our Great Lakes, and support jobs and our local economy by investing in our communities. Funding is now more critical than ever as many communities are struggling to address the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic downturn.

We urge Congress meet its deadline providing robust funding for [clean water and Great Lakes restoration priorities](#). In particular, we call on you to support the House passed funding levels for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (\$335 million) and begin to address the staggering water infrastructure investment backlog threatening the safety of our drinking water by adopting the House passed water infrastructure emergency supplemental provisions. Congress must ensure that in making this \$11 billion investment through the State Revolving Funds, Sec. 221 Sewer Overflow Grants, and Lead Reduction programs that EPA prioritize resiliency and provide additional subsidization for disadvantaged communities and those facing economic hardship.

3. Reauthorize the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI)

Over the past decade the GLRI has improved lives across Great Lakes communities after decades of environmental damage threatened public health, the regional economy, and drinking water. Since its inception, the 8-state region has successfully undertaken one of the world's largest freshwater ecosystem restoration projects, achieving economic returns of more than 3 to 1. The House recognized these successes when it reauthorized and expanded the GLRI, overwhelmingly passing H.R. 4031 earlier this year.

Yet, despite this support, the GLRI Act has yet to become law. The success of the GLRI is predicated on its multi-year authorization providing funding certainty for the long-term projects critical to the remediation of toxic hotspots and the restoration of the Great Lakes ecosystem. We

urge Congress to include the full five-year reauthorization as proposed by S. 2295 and passed by the House under H.R. 4031, authorizing the GLRI through FY2026 with incremental increases to its original funding level of \$475 million, in WRDA (below) or other legislation this year.

4. Support Great Lakes Provisions in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2020

WRDA is an important step in funding and addressing water infrastructure needs across the nation and in the Great Lakes region. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) plays a significant role in helping Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin protect and restore the Great Lakes. Through projects that have been authorized like the electric dispersal barrier in the Chicago Sanitary Ship Canal that helps prevent aquatic invasive species from entering the Great Lakes to other programs like the Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration Program, Army Corps investments are helping our region grow our economy and protect our environment.

We thank both the House and the Senate for working in a bi-partisan manner to advance WRDA on its regular two-year cycle and urge your support for critical [Great Lakes provisions](#), like the Brandon Road project and the GLRI (above), in a final package. These provisions help restore the Great Lakes and help all communities build resilient infrastructure using natural or nature-based solutions.

5. Invest in our Critical Water Infrastructure

Communities across the Great Lakes region continue to grapple with crumbling, antiquated drinking water and wastewater infrastructure that results in sewage contamination that closes beaches and harms fish and wildlife, lead poisoning that threatens the health of people, and skyrocketing water bills that are putting a financial strain on people and families. A staggering \$188 billion is needed over the next 20 years in improvements, upgrades, and repairs in the region. Moreover, paying for water infrastructure projects is expensive and often falls on communities that cannot afford it, underscoring the importance of financial support from the federal government.

Fixing our region's failing water infrastructure can put people to work and spur economic revitalization in our towns and cities. As proposed in H.R. 1497, S. 3590, S. 3591, and passed under H.R. 2, the Coalition urges Congress to reauthorize and expand federal support under the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds, prioritizing resiliency and supporting communities facing economic hardship by providing additional subsidization for disadvantaged communities and promoting investment in green infrastructure projects. It is critical we begin to address this infrastructure crisis that has hamstrung communities and left too many low-income and communities of color facing unsafe water. Federal investment in our water infrastructure can ensure safe, clean, and affordable water is available to all.

We thank you for your efforts in working in a bi-partisan manner across the House and the Senate to advance these priorities in the closing stages of the 116th Congress. Ensuring we continue to invest in our communities, protect our drinking water, and restore our Great Lakes is essential and we cannot delay this much needed assistance.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Chad Lord, the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition policy director, at clord@npca.org with questions.

Sincerely,

Laura Rubin
Director