

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-107, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

April 14, 2020

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Leader Hoyer, and Leader McCarthy,

As the nation grapples with the worst public health and economic crisis we have seen in a century, Congress must take action to ensure that everyone in this country has access to the clean water they need to keep their families safe. The global COVID-19 pandemic has magnified and exacerbated the existing challenges facing our water systems and the inequities blocking access to clean, safe water. Since the CDC saysⁱ one of the most important tools for combatting the novel coronavirus is to wash your hands and clean and disinfect your home, access to clean water can literally mean life or death. Too many communities, especially low income and communities of color, suffer from failing water infrastructure, polluted water supplies, unaffordable water rates, and many other water issues that make it even more difficult to survive in this time of chaos and crisis. Yet, despite three coronavirus response packages passed so far, no provisions have been included to provide clean water to those who lack it.

The American Society of Civil Engineers gives our wastewater infrastructure a D+ grade and our drinking water infrastructure a D, citing failing pipes--many over a century old--and emerging water contaminants.ⁱⁱ Moreover, too many communities in this country still lack even basic wastewater and drinking water services. The EPA's Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey, released in October 2018, estimates we need to invest over \$470 billion over the next 20 years to maintain and improve our systems.ⁱⁱⁱ The Clean Watershed Needs Survey, last conducted in 2012, estimates an additional \$271 billion in wastewater and stormwater infrastructure needs.^{iv} However, if we made the necessary investments in our water infrastructure, it would result in over \$220 billion in total annual economic activity and generate and sustain about 1.3 million jobs over a 10 year period.^v For our health and our economy, we cannot wait to address these challenges any longer.

We need immediate action that will ensure every individual and family has access to the clean water they need as well as real, significant, longer-term investment in our water programs and systems across the country to finally eliminate water inequities, spur economic recovery and growth, and build strong, resilient communities.

Immediate Actions to Protect Public Health During Covid-19 Crisis

Congress must take action to address immediate needs, including:

- Prohibit utilities from shutting water off from households that have fallen behind on their water bills and mandate safe reconnection of households previously disconnected prior to the crisis.
 - Fund costs for utilities to restore and maintain water service for homeowners and renters. This funding must be tied to provisions that prohibit water shut-offs and establish mandatory safe water reconnections, as well as lenient repayment plans, debt forgiveness, affordable rate structures, and at least 120 days for consumers to regain their financial footing before a shutoff moratorium could be lifted.
 - Provide grant or low interest loan funding to help support utility operations at a time when revenues are dropping dramatically.
- At least \$3 billion in immediate funding for a Low Income Households Drinking Water and Wastewater Assistance Program modeled after the LIHEAP program to help keep struggling households connected to essential water and wastewater service.
- \$100 million in immediate funding for immediate potable water distribution, filter installation, and sanitation systems for homes without access to these necessities, prioritizing urban, rural, Tribal, and indigenous communities

In addition to immediate actions to address the critical need of providing safe water supplies, Congress should ensure that clean and safe drinking water is prioritized in future packages aimed at restoring our communities and reviving the economy.

Protecting and Strengthening our Communities

Congress should invest in infrastructure to stimulate economic growth and protect public health, including:

- \$6 billion over 5 years for the EPA Environmental Justice Small Grants (EJSG) Program with increased grant size of \$500,000, which funds communities to address environmental risks from concentrated pollution, to prepare for climate change effects and improve public health.
- \$45 billion over 10 years for the Reducing Lead in Drinking Water program to provide grants and technical assistance for completely replacing lead service lines in households, daycare centers, and schools, thus protecting our children and communities from the damaging impacts of toxic lead pollution.
- \$1 billion over 5 years for School Drinking Fountain Replacement to help schools and daycare centers replace lead-bearing water fountains and faucets with water hydration stations with certified filters that meet the Q<1 standard.
- \$100 billion over five years for Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds, split evenly between the two SRFs, with at least 20 percent of funding distributed to disadvantaged communities as additional subsidization (grants) rather than loans and at least 20 percent of CWSRF funding set-aside for investing in green infrastructure projects.
- Address those most at risk from toxic PFAS contamination through:
 - \$300 million/year to the Defense Environmental Restoration Account and \$100 million/year to the BRAC Closure account to remediate PFAS contamination at DOD installations where COVID-19 patients are being quarantined.
 - \$50 million/year to the Defense Environmental Restoration Account to install point of entry systems at households located near DOD installations, if the household is served by a well and PFAS has been detected in the household drinking water.

- Clarify that PFAS dischargers are subject to limits under the Clean Water Act and set a two-year deadline for a drinking water standard that is protective of vulnerable populations.
- \$20 billion over 5 years for Superfund Site Cleanup to protect communities from toxic pollution.
- \$60 million/year for the Small & Disadvantaged Communities program, which assists public water systems in underserved, small and disadvantaged communities meet Safe Drinking Water Act requirements.
- \$120 million/year for Alaska Native Villages and Rural Communities Water Grant program.
- \$100 million/year for the U.S.-Mexico Border Water Infrastructure Program to provide drinking water and wastewater services to communities living on the border.
- \$225 million/year for the Sewer Overflow Control Grants.
- \$1.75 billion/year, including \$750 million in grants, for the USDA's Water & Waste Disposal Loan & Grant Program. This program funds construction and improvements for drinking water, wastewater, and storm water systems for rural households and businesses and Tribes, and will both provide the clean water these communities need while also spurring economic activity and creating jobs.

Investing in Long-Term Economic Recovery and Sustainability

Congress should also invest in programs that will be important for long-term recovery from this global pandemic and will ensure our communities are sustainable and prepared for future crises. In particular, Congress should:

- Establish an EPA program providing grants for construction, repair, and replacement of individual household decentralized wastewater systems, and for connecting communities without sewer systems to existing sewer systems. This has great potential for job creation and would benefit frontline communities and communities that have been left behind everywhere from urban Florida to rural Alabama to coastal Oregon, all of whom deal with inadequate sewer and sanitation infrastructure in low-income communities.
- \$100 million/year for the National Institute of Environmental Health Science (NIEHS) Environmental Career Worker Training which provides job and safety training for disadvantaged and underrepresented members of communities of color and low-income communities to secure jobs in environmental restoration, construction, handling hazardous materials and waste, and emergency response.
- \$5 million/year for 10 years for the Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Program, which will provide job training opportunities for careers in the water utility sector and specifically target opportunities at low-income communities and communities of color.
- \$200 million/year for Clean Water Act Section 319 Nonpoint Source Management Program, which assists states in watershed preservation and restoration and has successfully helped improve water quality across the country.
- \$20 million/year for EPA's Wetlands Program Development Grants, targeted specifically for wetlands restoration and rebuilding to protect communities against flooding and other natural disasters and filter drinking water while also creating jobs.
- \$8.7 billion over 5 years for FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, which will fund non-structural flood mitigation projects and resilient infrastructure.
- \$1.5 billion to establish a new program within the USDA's Farm Service Agency and Farm Credit System offering grants, specifically targeting small and mid-sized producers that supply local food systems, including farmers markets, restaurants, and schools. Payments to farmers of color, socially disadvantaged farmers, beginning farmers, and veteran farmers should be double those offered to other eligible farmers.
- \$100 million/year for USDA's Soil Health Demonstration Trial.
- \$7 billion/year by 2024 for the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program, including \$200 million/year for Conservation Innovation Grants.

- \$7 billion/year by 2024 for USDA’s Conservation Stewardship Program.
- Enroll 40 million acres of marginal land through the USDA’s Conservation Reserve Program by 2030, with a greater focus on acres devoted to water quality practices like streamside buffers.
- Increase funding for USDA’s Regional Conservation Partnership Program to \$1 billion a year.
- Ensure that all infrastructure funding prioritizes resilient and nature-based solutions such as restoring wetlands, building rain gardens, and installing permeable roads and sidewalks, and that new projects and repairs do not increase stormwater runoff to surrounding waterways or wetlands.

As Congress looks to future legislation to address the public health and economic challenges created by COVID-19, we urge you to strongly consider the above requests. We must ensure that everyone in this country has access to the clean water they need in this crisis, and that we make smart, real investments in our water infrastructure to build more resilient communities, protect public health, and create good jobs and a stronger economy.

Thank you,

Alabama Rivers Alliance
 Alaska Community Action on Toxics
 Alice Ferguson Foundation
 Alliance for the Great Lakes
 Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
 American Littoral Society
 American Rivers
 American Sustainable Business Council
 Amigos Bravos
 Bayou City Waterkeeper
 Black Millennials 4 Flint
 Cahaba River Society
 California Coastkeeper Alliance
 California League of Conservation Voters
 Center for Biological Diversity
 Center for Climate Change and Health
 Center for Environmental Health
 Children's Environmental Health Network
 Clean Water Action
 ClimatePlan
 Community Water Center
 Conservation Alabama
 Conservation Colorado
 Conservation Minnesota
 Conservation Voters for Idaho
 Conservation Voters of South Carolina
 CURE (Clean Up the River Environment)
 Earthjustice
 Earthworks
 Ecology Center
 EcoWorks
 Empower Michgian
 Environment New Jersey
 Environment America
 Environment Michigan
 Environment North Carolina
 Environment Texas

Environmental & Public Health Consulting
 Environmental Health Strategy Center
 Environmental Working Group
 FixHoCo
 FLOW (For Love of Water)
 Freshwater Future
 Friends of the Earth US
 Friends of the River
 Friends of Violetville Park
 GreenLatinos
 Harpeth Conservancy
 Healthy Gulf
 Hip Hop Caucus
 Illinois Council of Trout Unlimited
 Illinois Environmental Council
 Junction Coalition
 League of Conservation Voters
 Learning Disabilities Association of America
 Maine Conservation Voters
 Martin Luther King jr Freedom Center
 Metropolitan Planning Council
 MI Air MI Health
 Mi Familia Vota
 Michigan Environmental Council
 Michigan League of Conservation Voters
 Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy
 Minnesota Well Owners Organization
 Natural Resources Defense Council
 National Wildlife Federation
 North Carolina League of Conservation Voters
 Nebraska Wildlife Federation
 New Jersey Sustainable Business Council
 New York League of Conservation Voters
 New York Sustainable Business Council
 Northern Michigan Environmental Action Council (NMEAC)
 Ohio Environmental Council

Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC)
PennEnvironment
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Population Connection Action Fund
Puget Soundkeeper Alliance
Rachel Carson Council
River Network
PolicyLink
Safer Chemicals Healthy Families
Safer States
Self-Help Enterprises
SERCAP, INC
Sierra Club

South Platte River Waterkeeper
Southern Environmental Law Center
Straits Area Concerned Citizens for Peace, Justice &
Environment
Tennessee Clean Water Network
The Alaska Center
Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition
Virginia Conservation Network
Virginia League of Conservation Voters
Washington Environmental Council
Water Foundation
Wisconsin Conservation Voters

ⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/checklist-household-ready.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Drinking-Water-Final.pdf>,
<https://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Wastewater-Final.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.epa.gov/dwsrf/epas-6th-drinking-water-infrastructure-needs-survey-and-assessment>

^{iv} <https://www.epa.gov/cwns>

^v

http://thevalueofwater.org/sites/default/files/Economic%20Impact%20of%20Investing%20in%20Water%20Infrastructure_VOW_FINAL_pages.pdf