



NACWA/AMWA CAMPAIGN

# Affordable Water, Resilient Communities



BY KRISTINA SURFUS

In response to the urgent need for greater federal investment in clean water and drinking water infrastructure, NACWA teamed up with the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA) to launch the *Affordable Water, Resilient Communities* campaign to bring greater federal attention to this critical issue.

The *Affordable Water, Resilient Communities* campaign launched with three goals: establish a permanent and reliable Low-Income Water Customer Assistance Program (LIWCAP), secure much-needed wastewater infrastructure funding, and help public water utilities recover from the pandemic.

This campaign has already found success in centering the needs of the public clean water sector in Congress, with the Biden Administration, and in the national media.

While the policy proposals are complex, the underlying driver is simple: public water sector utilities support healthy, resilient communities, and local utilities and their customers have borne the increasing cost of this work without an adequate federal partner for years. The federal government needs to view utilities as true partners in community, environmental, and economic health and provide commensurate support for the utility work being done every day.

Each of the goals of the campaign are well underway. As to the first goal, NACWA is working to provide guidance and recommendations to the Department of Health and Human Services as it works to stand up federal water customer assistance provided in the December 2020 (\$638 Million) and March 2021 (\$500 Million) COVID-19 and Appropriations packages. NACWA is also closely engaged in the ongoing Congressional discussions



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around establishing a permanent, long-term federal funding program for low-income water ratepayers.

To the second goal – increased federal investment in water infrastructure – developments are steadily building over the course of the year and as Congressional and White House attention pivots from COVID-19 relief to recovery. In February, Buffalo Sewer Authority General Manager OJ McFoy testified on behalf of NACWA on the importance of federal water infrastructure investment before the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee. In March, DC Water Chief Operating Officer Kishia Powell testified on behalf of NACWA before the Senate Environment & Public Works Committee. NACWA was the only national association to be invited to testify at both hearings, providing NACWA’s message at a critical time. Both Committees are working to prepare legislation to authorize higher annual funding levels for key water programs and to provide a framework for an infusion of federal funding through a major, multi-sector infrastructure package.

The third goal of the campaign – help public water utilities recover from the pandemic and play a vital role in a strong economic recovery with reinvestment in America’s critical infrastructure – can also be directly advanced by this focus on infrastructure. NACWA’s CEO Adam Krantz emphasized recently to the press: “As we continue to look for ways to upgrade America’s infrastructure, federal investments in water must be on par with other infrastructure sectors like surface transportation. Water is the most heavily regulated of all infrastructure sectors *because*

it is the most vital for protecting public health and the environment... Now is the time for the Administration and Congress to step up and help provide Americans with the 21st century water systems they deserve, create solid full-time jobs, and mitigate rising water rates to ensure more families are able to affordably access the water services that all deserve.”

Whether the goal is job creation, building back better after decades of federal under-investment, positioning communities for economic opportunity, or ensuring public health, resilience and climate-readiness, water infrastructure must be at the center of these overdue investments. Trust that the Association is working hard day in and day out – just like the water workforce does each and every day – to seize the opportunity to transform how water infrastructure and water utilities are considered, engaged, and funded at the federal level.

As NACWA staff, we are continually impressed by not only the dedication of our membership to their communities but also to the greater good of the sector, and their interest and engagement in the NACWA community and NACWA advocacy. As utilities engage over the course of the summer, we hope that our campaign can be a resource, as well as a tool to help elevate our member utilities’ local stories and voices.

The overall message to Congress and the Biden Administration is clear, straightforward, and powerful when spoken united: The federal government must reengage as a strong, long-term, cost-sharing partner in water investment in a manner that is on par with other critical infrastructure sectors. To do anything less is unconscionable given the scale of water challenges communities face and the pressure that has been placed on local communities and customers year after year.

Visit [www.affordableh2o.org](http://www.affordableh2o.org) for campaign resources and to learn more, and join the conversation on social media by using #affordableh2o.

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