

July 20, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer,

Given the ongoing pandemic and its continued economic impacts, we applaud your continued efforts to craft responsible, bipartisan legislative relief packages to help steer our country through the pandemic. As the Senate focuses its attention on another critical phase of COVID-19 relief over the coming weeks, we urge that assistance for public clean water agencies be included in this critical next package. We urge direct financial assistance to clean water utilities to offset the significant revenue losses they are experiencing so they can keep serving their communities and customers with vital clean water services during the pandemic.

Clean water utilities are essential to keeping our communities safe and have been directly hit by the pandemic like many other sectors – but so far direct relief has not been provided through legislation signed into law to provide COVID-19 relief. The economic impacts of COVID-19 on the water sector are expected to be enormous – [estimated](#) at \$30 billion in total impact to water and wastewater. We urge you to address this critical issue in this next package.

The clean water sector is on the front lines of helping prevent the spread of COVID-19. As the pandemic emerged, clean water utilities quickly implemented emergency plans and ensured the continuity of their vital operations. Their essential workforce continues to ensure that households and businesses can maintain access to safe and reliable water services throughout the shutdowns and reopenings. Keeping the water flowing and treatment plants operating is key to ensuring that workplaces and businesses can safely reopen to get the economy moving again.

Clean water utilities face decreased revenue from households less able to pay their bills due to historic levels of unemployment. Many utilities have voluntarily stopped water shutoffs for delinquent accounts, ensuring clean water remains flowing during the pandemic to all households. But these same utilities are also facing increased revenue losses as many households become unable to pay their bills.

At the same time, the drop-off in commercial and industrial water usage due to pandemic shutdowns has led to decreased revenues and threatens to impact local infrastructure investments and utility operations and jobs. The reality is that the fixed operational costs to run clean water utilities do not change just because less water is being used. These lost revenue

impacts come on top of the additional direct COVID-19 related expenditures to maintain emergency operations during the pandemic.

Public clean water utilities have worked hard to keep the water flowing for all households, including those unable to pay. But those costs add up and are currently being borne solely at the local level. We applaud the U.S. House's passage, through its HEROES Act, of \$1.5 Billion in federal assistance to aid water ratepayers.

Our country has a strong history of federal, state and local partnerships to support funding for the water utility sector and we urge the federal government to assist communities in providing these life-critical services. Without federal assistance, the financial costs of the pandemic for the clean water sector will have to be passed on to local customers through higher water rates at a time when many of these same customers do not have the financial resources to pay higher rates.

In sum, we simply ask Congress to recognize the needs of clean water utilities and provide federal assistance to address ratepayer burdens and make utilities whole for doing their part to respond to the coronavirus pandemic. This critical support will help keep local utilities financially strong.

We further lend our support to other broadly supported forms of municipal and water sector assistance. These include extending federal assistance for COVID-19 related sick and family leave to public sector workers, and assistance in providing hazard pay for essential workers.

As we look forward to the future beyond the pandemic, investment in vital infrastructure sectors will play a key role in any economic recovery. Until then, municipal clean water agencies are working creatively, diligently, and tirelessly to emerge as strong as possible from the pandemic. We urge swift passage of COVID-19 relief to help ensure the stability of clean water services in communities across the country.

Thank you for your dedication to help the country through this unprecedented pandemic.

Sincerely,

Adam Krantz
Chief Executive Officer
National Association of Clean Water Agencies