July 17, 2017

Dear Chairman Frelinghuysen, Ranking Member Lowey, Chairman Calvert, and Ranking Member McCullum:

On behalf of America’s 19,000 cities and towns, I write to thank you for your leadership in passing an Interior and Environment Appropriations Bill that preserves funding for city priorities for water infrastructure and cleanup programs, as well as regional ecosystem restoration efforts that were targeted for elimination in the President’s budget proposal.

At the same time, city leaders are concerned that the bill lacks sufficient funding for programs that have a tremendous impact of the lives of our most vulnerable citizens and shifts the cost of intergovernmental projects and services from the federal level to municipal governments. For many cities, particularly small and rural communities with a limited tax-base, the cost shift may be too great to be made up for with local revenue.

As the voice of cities in Washington, NLC appreciates the work of the committee to preserve funding for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund and the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay Initiatives, and to increase funding for the Brownfields and Superfund programs. These programs are vital to ensuring that our residents have clean water to drink and a healthy environment in which to live. Moreover, these investments will help revitalize our communities and grow our economy.

We are concerned, however, that the bill reduces funding to the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and WIFIA, hindering local efforts to improve our nation’s water infrastructure. Given the massive infrastructure need in this country, now is not the time to cut back on these programs that keep our economy moving forward. Moreover, while we applaud the committee’s effort to restore partial funding to the Land and...
Water Conservation Fund from near elimination under the President’s proposal, a cut of $125 million means fewer greenways and parks in communities, impacting local stormwater management. To advance the economic benefits and job creation these programs have created, robust funding is needed for all of these programs. We urge Congress to continue to make robust investments in these and other programs that are critical to cities.

Cities are growing the job market and driving the U.S. economy. Cities are home to 86 percent of the nation’s population, 88 percent of total real income, and 91 percent of real gross domestic product. Local governments invest $7 trillion annually on services residents expect, including clean and safe water. In 2014, local governments spent $115 billion on water and wastewater infrastructure.

As the FY18 budget and appropriations process continues, we look forward to working with Members of Congress in both Chambers to raise the budget caps to a level sufficient for meeting the responsibilities that citizens expect from their elected representatives. Additionally, we urge every Member of Congress to seek the direct feedback of local elected officials in their home states and congressional districts. Please consider NLC a resource to that end by contacting Carolyn Berndt, NLC’s Program Director for Sustainability, at 202-626-3101 or berndt@nlc.org.

Sincerely,

Clarence E. Anthony
CEO and Executive Director