

December 10, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 2051

## **RE: Support for Build Back Better Action Water Infrastructure Grant Programs**

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

WaterNow Alliance is a nonprofit [network of 700+ local water leaders](#) in 43 states nationwide advancing sustainable, affordable, equitable, and climate resilient water strategies. [NLC](#) is the voice of America's cities, towns and villages, representing more than 200 million people nationwide. We commend your leadership on the Build Back Better Act (H.R. 5376) and write in support of five key provisions that will protect public health and help secure the nation's water resources now and for future generations. For the reasons detailed below, we urge you to retain these vital water grant programs in the Act's final version.

- 1. Section 30301 – \$9 billion for lead service line replacements and other lead remediation measures in disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.** Exposure to lead through drinking water pipes, i.e., lead service lines, causes severe health impacts, including brain and kidney damage, behavioral problems, and impairments to the nervous system. Children are especially vulnerable to these impacts. While EPA banned the use of lead service lines in 1986 in new development, it is estimated that between 6 to 10 million lead service lines remain across the U.S. Providing the grant funding appropriated by Section 303301 to remove and replace these lead lines in disadvantaged communities, as well as provide remediation measures such as new drinking water fountains in schools, is essential to overcoming this public health crisis.
- 2. Section 30302 – \$225 million for new grants to states and Tribes to assist low-income water customers pay water debt and make water rates more affordable.** Households in the United States have experienced considerable increases in the cost of water and wastewater services over the past decades. According to a 2020 [study](#), water and sewer costs are the fastest-growing category of household costs. Since 2010, water and sewer service costs grew by 4.83% per year. A 2019 [study](#) found that rising water rates are most likely to impact communities of color. The COVID-19 pandemic has made these affordability challenges far worse. The funding appropriated by Section 30302 is an important step towards making clean, safe water affordable and accessible to everyone.
- 3. Section 110014 – \$125 million for investments in alternative sources of water.** In the face of droughts and storms intensified by climate change, local water leaders are looking for ways to diversify their water supply portfolios and build resilience. These alternative water source projects include advanced onsite reuse systems that capture and treat grey and/or black water for non-potable reuse, greywater systems that capture and treat sink or

laundry water and use it for outdoor irrigation, rainwater harvesting systems that capture rainwater for irrigation or other non-potable uses, and groundwater recharge projects that replenish groundwater aquifers with rainwater or other highly treated reclaimed water for potable uses. Supporting these types of projects with the funding appropriated by Section 110014 is essential to making these alternative sources of water widely available.

- 4. Section 110015 – \$1.850 billion for investments in projects to reuse stormwater and reduce sewer overflows with increased federal cost-share for distressed communities.** Hundreds of billions of gallons of untreated wastewater and stormwater are released as combined sewer overflows each year in the U.S. Polluted urban stormwater runoff continues to be a major cause of impairments to surface water quality and adverse impacts to public health. Innovative, sustainable solutions to capture and use rainwater before it runs off into maxed out sewer systems are crucial strategies to reducing sewer overflows while adapting to the impacts of climate change. These solutions include nature-based approaches such as green roofs, urban forests, rain gardens, bioswales, permeable pavement, and low impact development. Making the funding appropriated by Section 110015 available for these needed investments is paramount to updating the nation’s aging sewer systems.
  
- 5. Section 110016 – \$150 million for investments to repair or replace failing domestic septic systems, particularly for low-income households.** Failing septic systems contaminate local groundwater as well as surface waters. For example, over 300,000 septic systems in the eastern part of Long Island are leaking nitrogen and other pollutants into Long Island Sound. And because they do not have access to centralized treatment systems, 40% of Kentuckians rely on septic tanks or other private systems—the condition of which and full extent of related pollution is yet unknown. The much-needed funding that appropriately prioritizes low-income households at Section 110016 is essential for combatting this serious public and environmental health challenge.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments in strong support of the above sections of the Build Back Better Act, and look forward to working with you to build the nation’s sustainable, climate resilient water systems of the 21st century.

Sincerely,



Cynthia Koehler  
Executive Director  
WaterNow Alliance



Clarence E. Anthony  
CEO and Executive Director  
National League of Cities