

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20515

April 07, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Thank you for your leadership in passing bipartisan legislation to address the urgent needs of the American people as we confront the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic and resulting economic devastation. As Congress prepares for a Phase 4 package to help address this deepening economic crisis, we respectfully request that you prioritize water infrastructure funding to local water providers and provide assistance to ensure that no American goes without water service due to an inability to pay during this pandemic. Handwashing is our first line of defense against the spread of disease, and every person in our country needs access to running water to protect themselves, their families and their communities.

A robust water infrastructure funding program would not only help protect the public's health, but it would also provide long-term economic stimulus to our country. According to the *Clean Water Council*, every \$1 billion in water infrastructure investment creates an estimated 20,003 to 26,669 jobs and can have far-reaching economic benefits, tripling in size with total demand for goods and services reaching an estimated \$2.87 to \$3.46 billion.<sup>1</sup>

Given this, we respectfully request that the next COVID-19 response package contains:

1. **At least \$12.5 billion in immediate assistance** for local water and wastewater providers to provide low-income assistance, household debt forgiveness, and moratoriums on water disconnections and service restoration to previously disconnected households;

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-112shrg26626/pdf/CHRG-112shrg26626.pdf>

2. **Shutoff protections** that require all states, localities and utilities receiving federal funds to adopt or maintain policies to prevent the shutoff of household water services for nonpayment and ensure water service restoration to previously disconnected residential customers during the COVID-19 public health emergency and for 180 days following the end of the emergency declaration (similar language was included in the draft House Phase 3 package, Sec. 199991 in Division X of the *Take Responsibility for Workers and Families Act*); and
3. **Annual, Robust Federal Funding** for public clean water and drinking providers through the EPA's State Revolving Fund programs, USDA's rural water programs and other water grants, as outlined in H.R. 1417, the *Water Affordability, Transparency, Equity and Reliability (WATER) Act*, which will improve our water infrastructure, stimulate the economy and create up to nearly 1 million jobs across the country.

Even before the pandemic, our country was facing a water affordability crisis. The *National Association of Clean Water Agencies* estimated that the pandemic will cost \$12.5 billion in lost revenue for wastewater providers, largely due to households' inability to pay.<sup>2</sup> This estimate includes \$336 million in direct costs of forgiving debt and restoring service.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, over the years, federal assistance to water infrastructure has fallen 77 percent in real terms since its peak in 1977. Although federal dollars have decreased, several studies including a *Michigan State University* study projected that rising water bills would become unaffordable for as many as 36 percent of American households by 2019,<sup>4</sup> while *Food and Water Watch* found that an estimated 15 million people in the United States would experience a water shutoff for nonpayment in 2016.<sup>5</sup>

As unemployment reaches historic levels, if not adequately addressed, our nation's water affordability crisis will severely worsen. To combat this pandemic, we must act now to ensure our communities have the resources they need to gain access to safe and affordable water for all during this challenging time.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nacwa.org/news-publications/press-release-details/2020/03/20/coronavirus-impacting-clean-water-agencies-local-utilities-and-ratepayers-need-assistance>

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0169488>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/sites/default/files/rpt\\_1810\\_watershutoffs-web2.pdf](https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/sites/default/files/rpt_1810_watershutoffs-web2.pdf)

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,



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Brenda L. Lawrence  
Member of Congress

Ted Deutch  
Member of Congress

Sharice L. Davids  
Member of Congress

Elissa Slotkin  
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Bill Foster  
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Member of Congress

Alma S. Adams, Ph.D  
Member of Congress

Darren Soto  
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Bobby L. Rush  
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Terri A. Sewell  
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Steve Cohen  
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Eddie Bernice Johnson  
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Ro Khanna  
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James P. McGovern  
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Jesús G. "Chuy" García  
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Yvette D. Clarke  
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Stephen F. Lynch  
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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
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Bennie G. Thompson  
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Karen Bass  
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Mike Thompson  
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Ruben Gallego  
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Joseph P. Kennedy, III  
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Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  
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Ayanna Pressley  
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