

EMBARGO UNTIL:

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NACWA and AMWA Launch Affordable Water, Resilient Communities Campaign

Joint Effort by Water Sector Aims to Raise Awareness of Need for Strong Federal Partnership on Clean and Safe Water

(Washington, D.C.) – The National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) and the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA) kicked off their joint *Affordable Water, Resilient Communities* campaign today. The campaign will increase awareness among federal lawmakers, key stakeholders, and the public around the vital role of public water sector utilities in supporting healthy, resilient communities, the financial challenges local utilities and their customers face after years of increasing local costs and declining federal cost-share, and the critical need for greater federal investment in water infrastructure.

Federal investment in water infrastructure has declined to less than 5% while total costs for capital, operations and maintenance have grown for decades. This decline in federal investment, coupled with the growing cost to provide clean and safe water, have strained households' ability to pay for water services – with a disproportionate impact on low-income households – as water rates have steadily climbed to meet increasing infrastructure costs, public health demands, and environmental requirements.

The *Affordable Water, Resilient Communities* campaign launches with three goals:

1. Ensure efficient, effective implementation of federal water utility bill relief and establish a permanent federal low-income water customer assistance program.
2. Support increased federal investment in water infrastructure.
3. 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 to ensure a stronger, healthier, resilient future.

For more information, please visit www.affordableh2o.org. There, users will find resources and tools for advancing the campaign in their communities, including fact sheets, social media resources and more.

Adam Krantz, NACWA's Chief Executive Officer, issued the following statement:

"The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the critical services provided by the public clean water sector. For decades, this cornerstone of America's infrastructure – water – has been marginalized by the federal government while local communities and water customers have increasingly stepped up their investment and expanded their roles in advancing public health and environmental protection. Much-needed infrastructure upgrades and increasing compliance costs have fallen almost entirely on the backs of ratepayers – an untenable and unaffordable solution for millions of Americans.

"Congress has shown it recognizes the burden water customers face by appropriating \$638 million for the first ever Low-Income Water Customer Assistance Program (LIWCAP) in December. But Congress must do more. The sector estimates more than an \$8 billion shortfall in customer bill arrearages as a result of the pandemic – a steep increase that underscores a major challenge that existed for years.

"It is my hope that by coming together as a unified public water sector, we can persuade Congress to act to make the LIWCAP permanent, provide direct relief to water utilities that have struggled as a result of the pandemic, and restore a strong federal investment partner in water infrastructure to meet legacy and new challenges facing water utilities around the U.S."

Diane VanDe Hei, AMWA's Chief Executive Officer, issued this statement:

"Ensuring access to safe drinking water is essential to achieving equity and social justice for all Americans. But today the cost of basic water service poses a challenge to many low-income households, particularly for those in vulnerable communities. Aging water infrastructure and expanded regulatory mandates are expected to put additional upward pressure on local water rates in the coming years, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only added additional stress to households facing rising water bills.

"For years, the federal government has operated critical programs to help low-income households meet nutritional needs and cover home heating costs. Similar investments should be made to help in-need Americans maintain water and wastewater service. The public health and social justice return on such investments will far outweigh their initial costs, and will be particularly beneficial to vulnerable communities.

"We applaud Congress' appropriation for a new Low-Income Water Customer Assistance Program (LIWCAP) in December's COVID-19 relief bill, but that is only a first step. We look forward to working with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to authorize and fund LIWCAP as a permanent component of the federal safety net."

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About NACWA

For 50 years, the National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) has been the nation's recognized leader in legislative, regulatory, legal and communications advocacy on the full spectrum of clean water issues. NACWA represents public wastewater and stormwater agencies of all sizes nationwide. Our unique and growing network strengthens the advocacy voice for the public clean water sector and helps advance policies to provide affordable and sustainable clean water for all. Our vision is to advance sustainable and responsible policy initiatives that help to shape a strong and sustainable clean water future. For more information, visit us at www.nacwa.org.

About AMWA

The Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA) is an organization of the largest publicly owned drinking water systems in the United States, whose members provide clean and safe drinking water to more than 156 million Americans nationwide. AMWA's primary objective is to be the unified and definitive voice for the nation's largest publicly owned drinking water systems on regulatory, legislative, and security issues. For more information, visit us at www.amwa.net.