

Affordable Water, Resilient Communities™

The Path Forward

Clean water and drinking water utilities stand ready to work with the Biden Administration and Congress on critical water issues that have been prioritized on the campaign trail – rebuilding America’s infrastructure, addressing emerging water quality threats, addressing the challenges of climate change and resilience, and confronting environmental inequities. We advocate for:

Making water infrastructure investment a top priority. Modernizing and upgrading the country’s aging water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure while adapting it to meet changing climate and water use patterns and water quality priorities is the single largest public works need that our nation faces. Local governments are investing heavily but need a strong federal funding partner and an aggressive stance on federal infrastructure investment, with water as a core component.

No community can be resilient without affordable, accessible water. And while climate change is caused by air pollution, the impacts of climate change are largely water-related. Utilities are already at the front lines of helping communities adapt to “new normals” and manage extreme events. There is much more utilities can and will need to do to ensure their communities are resilient. Both greater funding and the flexibility to innovate are needed for utilities to accelerate these efforts.

Further, investing in water infrastructure can go a long way toward addressing environmental justice and legacy inequity concerns if investment is directed strategically. Communities least financially able to manage rate increases to pay for needed upgrades themselves frequently face historic underinvestment, legacy pollution, older and outsized infrastructure that no longer meets the needs of the community, economic or industrial decline, and/or greater susceptibility to natural hazards and climate change – making water affordability a clear environment justice issue. Directing investment toward communities who have long suffered these inequities can begin to right these wrongs.

Additional concrete steps can advance these goals including supporting Supplemental Environmental Projects (SEPs) in Clean Water Act settlements to facilitate additional investments in environmental justice initiatives, and supporting local and more diverse workforce development. In short, smart federal investment in water infrastructure



can accomplish the Administration’s social, economic, and environmental objectives more effectively and impactfully than similar investments in other infrastructure sectors.

Working with the municipal water community to advance water protection and regulatory compliance and address affordability. In the face of myriad challenges, from water quality to rate pressure to climate change, utilities are innovating and adapting to the extent permissible within the frameworks of federal statutes. The federal government’s support for these efforts should include: supporting watershed-based adaptive management; a “one water” approach that breaks down silos that hinder innovation; and supporting more viable and holistic approaches to assessing ratepayer affordability and community financial capability that takes into full account low-income ratepayer struggles. .

EPA should continue to embrace the regulatory flexibility built into the Clean Water Act such as integrated planning. With science and technology evolving rapidly in the water sector, new solutions that are more cost-effective, climate-friendly, and less resource-intensive – and which may also generate greater environmental and economic co-benefits for local communities – must be given the room and support to thrive and achieve vital compliance goals.

If we take this path forward we can address the water affordability challenge together. We can provide access to essential water and wastewater services to all and do so affordably and sustainably. And we can develop a more diverse, well-trained, mobile and environmentally conscientious workforce.

