

November 16, 2016

Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
Executive Chamber
New York State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Re: Grant funding for water infrastructure in the SFY2017-18 State Budget

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We write to urge that you continue the recent progress on clean water infrastructure by including at least \$800 million in grant funding for water infrastructure projects in your proposed SFY2017-18 Executive Budget. Additionally, with the Water Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2015 (WIIA) due to sunset after SFY2017-18, we urge you to establish this crucial grant program as a permanent line item in the budget, as the need for this type of investment will never go away.

As you know, few issues are as important to our health, economy, and environment, as safe, reliable clean water infrastructure. Following the crisis in Flint, Michigan, as well as the many water contamination issues affecting New York, including lead in drinking water, and poorly regulated chemicals harming communities like Hoosick Falls, Newburgh, Petersburg and elsewhere, water quality is now an issue on everyone's minds.

Infrastructure investment is fundamental to a proactive strategy not only for providing clean drinking water, but also safe waters for swimming, boating, fishing and other recreational pursuits that support a high quality of life as well as many businesses. While water infrastructure investment alone cannot fix all of New York's water quality concerns, taking action on this area is a key step to address various water quality issues statewide.

In recent years, your leadership, in partnership with state legislators has begun to reverse decades of inadequate investment. Resources first made available in the SFY2015-16 budget – and the subsequent doubling of the available funding within the WIIA program in the current budget – has made an enormous difference for communities who may not have otherwise had the means to repair and replace their degrading water infrastructure.

Water infrastructure investment provides good local jobs and a boost to the economy. The United States Conference of Mayors determined that each public dollar invested in water infrastructure increases private long-term Gross Domestic Product output by \$6.35. The United States Department of Commerce has estimated that each job created in the local water and wastewater industry creates 3.68 jobs in the national economy and each public dollar spent yields \$2.62 in economic output in other industries. These benefits are unlocked by the WIIA, which has effectively leveraged other sources of funding to put shovels in the ground.

However, despite the successes of the program, needs still far exceed available funding.

In the Environmental Facility Corporation's (EFC) 2017 Draft Intended Use Plan (IUP), it is stated that "the demand for EFC's financial assistance is higher than ever, in part due to the renewed focus on water infrastructure issues, and because of the recent enactment of the Water Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2015." It is expected that for 2017, EFC will only be able to meet 14 percent of the identified statewide demand.

To further that point, a publication recently released by the Construction Advancement Institute and the Construction Industry Council found that less than 30 percent of projects in the Hudson Valley that requested grant funding through WIIA received an award. Additionally, according to EFC data, statewide 50 percent of the projects with completed applications received grant funding. However, these statistics do not include the many communities that we know have water infrastructure needs but have not submitted an application yet.

Nearly every New York community is facing high infrastructure costs and, oftentimes, is spending scarce resources to repair their existing assets. Making the switch from paying only for repairs to paying for proper operations and maintenance is a necessary step if municipalities are going to get a handle on this growing problem, control costs and provide better value to ratepayers and the environment. Many municipalities have – or are attempting to – implement "asset management approaches" for their infrastructure, but capital investments are needed to leverage these efforts. We must begin to address our long-term problems with long-term solutions.

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has identified over \$36 billion in necessary wastewater infrastructure investments statewide over the next 20 years, and the Department of Health (DOH) has identified over \$38 billion in drinking water infrastructure needs statewide over the next 20 years.

With your leadership, we have begun to make progress. **Investing at least \$800 million annually and ensuring WIIA is a permanent part of the state's budget planning will set a national standard on how states prioritize a "right" to clean and healthy water.**

We thank you for your commitment to this issue and consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

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