

**United States House of Representatives
Select Committee on the Climate Crisis**

**Hearing on June 11, 2021
“Building Climate Resilient Communities”**

Questions for the Record

**The Honorable Satya Rhodes-Conway
Mayor of the City of Madison, and
Co-Chair, Climate Mayors**

The Honorable Kathy Castor

- 1. In your testimony, you note that your state does not allow local governments to set energy codes. This is a problem in other states too, where cities and counties are bound by state laws that prohibit adoption of modern codes and standards that are proven to reduce emissions and protect lives and property in disasters. As we work to craft legislation to invest in infrastructure and economic recovery, how can Congress help states and local governments keep pace with advancements in codes and standards to reduce emissions and increase resilience?**

Wisconsin is one of numerous states that is lagging behind in the energy efficiency of new commercial buildings because of restrictions in state energy codes. As you reference, Chair Castor, the City of Madison is not authorized to establish and enforce a local energy code. We can only enforce the state code. Unfortunately, our state code is lacking many critical elements that other states around the nation benefit from. Wisconsin last adopted the 2015 version of the International Energy Conservation Code (IECC), but only after removing critical efficiency elements. That means the efficiency of our code is actually far behind even the 2015 version.

Specific to federal legislation to invest in infrastructure and economic recovery, support for more efficient and resilient buildings may be most impactful by requiring that funded projects be built to a stated efficiency standard, such as the 2021 IECC. This national model code incorporates strong but achievable efficiency standards. Requiring such a standard for any federal dollars spent would ensure federal investments in new buildings help advance energy efficiency and resilience goals. It would also provide localities with better buildings, and would give our local development sector more experience designing and constructing highly efficient and resilient buildings. That experience and familiarity may help facilitate the adoption of higher standards into state codes.

An approach I would not recommend pursuing would be that of prioritizing funds to localities with stronger standards. While this approach might be intended to incentivize states to adopt stronger codes, the result will more likely be that localities that are already most behind in the

efficiency of their buildings will remain most behind by missing out on some funding opportunities.

- 2. You testified about your efforts to advance sustainability and resilience for existing buildings and infrastructure. What examples can you share of ways that federal programs have hindered your local efforts to efficiently address needs to retrofit existing buildings and other assets so that they will be energy and water efficient and resilient to climate impacts? Are there specific programs that you believe would better support those local needs if they were made more flexible?**

Madison's current and historic program offerings have been tailored to the federal funds supporting the same objectives. As we look to the future, we have a desire to do more, and to do some things differently, and we are hopeful that the criteria associated with federal funding support will be flexible enough to support our shared goals.

Flexible funding sources that support holistic building retrofits: The City of Madison is working to establish a new building retrofit program for naturally-occurring (unsubsidized) affordable rental housing that addresses multiple needs around health, energy, and resilience. To be efficient with our time and resources, we need to address all a building's needs in one project. This includes energy efficiency, renewable energy, water conservation, critical building repairs, mold remediation, and lead remediation. We support increased funding to existing federal programs, and we also support funding new and more flexible programs.

Existing programs like the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG), the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), the HOME program are extremely valuable, but these dollars are often oriented to a specific subset of a building retrofit. A holistic program would be best implemented if it could be designed, administered, and reported on through a singular federal funding source with broader climate- and community-oriented goals. Reorienting the EECBG program around climate, equity, and resilience may be one way to achieve this objective.

Expanding eligibilities of existing programs: As mentioned, the purpose and requirements of existing programs such as EECBG, WAP, and HOME could be revised and expanded upon to make federal dollars go further in our communities. Congress should consider expanding eligible activities, including allowing funds to be used for both planning and implementation work. Lawmakers should also encourage the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to consider additional project benefits such as reducing energy burdens, increasing resilience, deploying innovative technologies, and improving the public health and safety of residents. Furthermore, Congress should enable communities to target low-income and moderate-income families. Ultimately, Congress should seek to streamline eligibility requirements across income-qualified energy programs. Finally, lawmakers should direct more aid to cities to implement improvements in the transportation sector by enabling cities to be a direct recipient of existing programs at the U.S. Department of Transportation or requiring that state sub-allocate a portion of their program dollars to the local level.

More grants for major infrastructure investments: Madison needs to make major investments in stormwater management and flood protection due in part on the wetter climate we are experiencing. The City has completed only a handful of 23 planned watershed studies to identify

our critical needs, and we have already identified \$75 million in critical stormwater projects. When the studies are complete, we could have a list of critical needs totaling hundreds of millions of dollars. Madison can currently fund stormwater investments primarily through local bonds or state loans. The debt service on loans and the impact on local utility rates are barriers to action on big-ticket items. The most helpful action the federal government could take would be to reinstitute historic grant funding for major stormwater infrastructure investments.

Aligning all funding around common goals: Everything we do must align with and advance our climate and equity goals. Numerous other funding sources have the potential to better integrate these goals. All projects should be built to future climate conditions. All grant agreements could incorporate workforce development standards to ensure that resulting jobs have family-sustaining wages, employer-provided benefits, and safe work conditions. Career pathways and apprenticeships should increase access to underrepresented populations, including low-income individuals, women, people of color, and historically marginalized communities.