



May 22, 2019

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman
Energy and Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden
Ranking Member
Energy and Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Paul Tonko
Chairman
Environment and Climate Change Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Shimkus
Ranking Member
Environment and Climate Change Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member Walden, Chairman Tonko, and Ranking Member Shimkus:

The Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA) appreciates the opportunity to submit comments for the record of today’s hearing on the LIFT America Act. As an organization representing the nation’s largest publicly owned drinking water systems, we appreciate the committee’s ongoing effort to bring attention to the needs of our country’s drinking water infrastructure.

In 2017 AMWA worked with the committee as it developed the Drinking Water System Improvement Act, legislation that included important components such as a reauthorization of the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) and a new program to help schools replace outdated drinking water fountains. We were pleased that these and several other drinking water-related authorizations were ultimately enacted last year as part of America’s Water Infrastructure Act (P.L. 115-270), better known as AWIA. However, these and other important authorizations are scheduled to expire in 2021 or sooner, so now is the time for Congress to revisit these programs to ensure they may continue to receive funding without interruption.

The LIFT America Act recognizes the importance of continuing many of these programs. The DWSRF, which annually allocates funding to every state in the country for use on water infrastructure projects that will improve or maintain public health, would be extended through 2024. Also extended through 2024 under the legislation would be programs to help schools and child care centers test their water for lead, to help schools replace outdated drinking water fountains, and to help community water systems complete required risk and resilience assessments. The bill also includes an important extension of Public Water System Supervision grants to states, also through 2024. While the appropriate authorization level for each of these programs will likely be debated, first and foremost it is essential that they are not allowed to

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expire. AMWA greatly appreciates that the LIFT America Act will keep them on solid footing for the next several years.

As the committee considers the LIFT America Act, and as Congress debates broader infrastructure legislation, AMWA supports the extension of several other expiring drinking water programs that fall in whole or in part under the committee's jurisdiction. These programs include:

- Reducing lead in drinking water grants under section 1459B of the Safe Drinking Water Act (42 U.S.C. 300j-19b). Congress established this program as part of the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act (P.L. 114-322) to help communities and low-income homeowners carry out projects to reduce the concentration of lead in drinking water, including through the full replacement of a lead service line. EPA will award grants to communities on a competitive basis, though priority for funding would go to communities otherwise unable to pay for lead service line replacements and which have exceeded EPA's action level for lead within the previous three years. Funding may not be used on partial lead service line replacements, but the statute allows the grants to subsidize replacement of both publicly and privately-owned portions of a lead service line, if the line serves a low-income household. Congress authorized the program to receive up to \$60 million per year through 2021, and to date Congress has appropriated a total of \$25 million. EPA expects to begin soliciting grant applications this summer.
- The Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program. Congress established WIFIA in 2014 as part of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act (P.L. 113-121) and reauthorized it through 2021 as part of AWIA. WIFIA is a low-cost, competitive loan program that helps communities proceed with major drinking water and wastewater infrastructure projects. Already, EPA reports that it has closed eight WIFIA loans delivering over \$2 billion in credit assistance, and the agency has invited another 42 projects in 17 states and the District of Columbia to apply for their own WIFIA loans. Importantly, WIFIA's unique 100-1 leveraging ability means that a \$50 million appropriation (the program's fully-authorized amount in FY20) translates into roughly \$5 billion worth of loans to support major water and wastewater projects across the nation – a tremendous value to the taxpayer.
- Drinking water infrastructure resilience and sustainability grants under section 1459A(l) of the Safe Drinking Water Act (42 U.S.C. 300j-19a(l)). Established as part of AWIA, this program offers grant funding to help community water systems plan and develop infrastructure projects that will protect the system against natural hazards such as floods, hurricanes, wildfires, and hydrologic changes. Eligible projects include those that will increase water efficiency, modify or relocate threatened water infrastructure, enhance water supplies through defined approaches like watershed management or desalination, increase energy efficiency, or implement other measures to increase the system's resilience. Congress authorized \$8 million over two years for the program, and President Trump sought \$2 million for it in his FY20 budget request. On May 15 a

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House Appropriations subcommittee approved an EPA spending bill that would fully fund the program at \$4 million in FY20 – the final year of its current authorization.

In addition to extending the authorizations of these programs, AMWA also believes the LIFT America Act offers an opportunity to make small, yet important, programmatic reforms. For example, as enacted under AWIA, EPA may only offer drinking water infrastructure resilience and sustainability grants to community water systems that serve disadvantaged communities or communities of fewer than 10,000 people. While these small and challenged systems are certainly worthy of assistance, community water systems that serve larger populations are also facing significant infrastructure needs related to natural hazards. So, in addition to extending this program and increasing its modest authorization, AMWA also supports expanding eligibility for drinking water infrastructure resiliency and sustainability grants to drinking water systems that serve communities of all sizes.

Again, AMWA appreciates the opportunity to provide comments for the record of today's hearing. The nation's drinking water infrastructure is too often forgotten when Congress deliberates bold infrastructure plans, so the LIFT America Act's inclusion of a drinking water title is an important reminder that our sector must be part of the discussion. We hope to work with the committee to refine the proposal and secure its advancement this year.

Thank you again for holding today's hearing.

Sincerely,



Diane VanDe Hei
Chief Executive Officer