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**Statement of Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr., as prepared for delivery  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy  
Markup of S. 611, the Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems  
Assistance Act**

I thank the Chairman for scheduling this markup on the Senate small system technical assistance bill, S. 611. Yesterday, the Chairman noted that the bill passed the Senate by unanimous consent and suggested that there are no substantive concerns with the legislation. However, I think several serious substantive concerns were raised by Democratic members of the Subcommittee at last week's hearing.

I hope that we can address those concerns today, or at least reach a bipartisan consensus about the potentially ambiguous terminology used in the bill. Such a consensus would address many of the substantive concerns on this side of the aisle and smooth this bill's path into law.

I have heard from the majority that the need for this bill is pressing because of the appropriations process, but Democrats have repeatedly offered to work on this legislation for the last 8 months. We should not give up on good policy simply because the majority delayed consideration.

I would like to mention some of the specific concerns which I raised last week and which could be addressed today. First, the legislation creates a preference for non-profits that are the most qualified and the most experienced.

Similar language in past Democratic proposals would have given priority to the most effective organizations. I think these terms are intended to be synonymous, and we all agree that the money should go to the most effective organizations. Witnesses at last week's hearing certainly shared that view. But the language could be more clear.

Second, the bill requires EPA to determine which non-profits small systems in each state find the most beneficial. This could be interpreted as requiring surveys in each state, an exercise that witnesses at last week's hearing opposed.

Third, the bill does not set out specific areas of technical assistance that are eligible for funding, leaving open the possibility that important work will go unfunded. Past Democratic

proposals have delineated several important areas of technical assistance, including sourcewater protection and identifying options for water and energy efficiency.

Lastly, and very importantly, the bill leaves unaddressed the major challenges facing water systems today. Water systems are facing serious threats from outdated infrastructure, lack of funding, emerging contaminants, and extreme weather. We in Congress have continued to underfund infrastructure improvements and have continued to undermine efforts to address climate change, so we should expect these problems to get worse before they get better.

Resources are central to any conversation about safe drinking water. Much of our nation's drinking water infrastructure is well beyond its useful life, and in desperate need of replacement. But this bill would reauthorize only the small pot of money for technical assistance, not the large pot of money for infrastructure repairs.

It is imperative that this Subcommittee take on the important tasks of reauthorizing the drinking water State Revolving Fund, ensuring that fracking is done safely, ensuring source water protection, addressing drought, and planning for climate change. The majority has so far been unwilling to take up these issues, but they cannot wait.

I hope that we can have a fruitful discussion of these issues today and in the coming months. I thank the Chairman for calling this markup, and I yield back.

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