

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “Trusting the Tap: Updating America’s Drinking Water Infrastructure”

March 29, 2022

Today, the Committee is continuing its ongoing work to ensure all Americans have access to safe and clean drinking water. When you think about it – there is no more basic necessity in our lives than drinking water. We all need to be able to trust that when we turn the tap of our faucets, the water coming out is safe for us and our families.

Unfortunately, for far too long, we failed to properly invest in our aging drinking water infrastructure. As a result, the American Society of Civil Engineers just last year gave our nation’s water infrastructure a “C-” grade. That’s simply unacceptable for a nation as prosperous as ours.

Fortunately, last November this Congress acted by passing the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which included \$30 billion to strengthen and rebuild our drinking water infrastructure. This is the single largest federal investment in our drinking water infrastructure in our nation’s history.

Specifically, the law provides over \$11 billion to bolster the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) – our main funding mechanism for drinking water projects. The Drinking Water SRF provides flexibility to states to address pressing drinking water challenges. It is imperative that we leverage this flexibility to ensure that we are lifting up communities. While the SRF has been a critical lifeline, there are many small, rural, and underserved communities that face barriers to access this federal funding source. Those communities, which often have the greatest needs, will benefit from additional resources and assistance, and we should ensure they can tap into them.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law also includes \$15 billion to help accelerate the inventory and removal of lead service lines, which is one of my priorities as Chairman. Earlier this year, I was pleased to see Newark, in my home state of New Jersey, complete its efforts to replace all of its lead service lines, but today millions of other Americans are being exposed to lead in drinking water through lead service lines. This is extremely troubling considering that there is no safe lead exposure level. All these lead pipes must be replaced, and this funding will provide a huge boost in our efforts to finally address the long-standing issue of lead in drinking water.

The law also allocates \$9 billion to remove dangerous PFAS chemicals, also known as forever chemicals, from drinking water. This funding will help water systems clean up PFAS

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contamination that is becoming more prevalent and is linked to adverse health effects. This investment will accelerate current infrastructure projects and kick start new, often costly projects.

With the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we are not only modernizing our infrastructure in a more resilient way for the future, but we are also strengthening our local economies. With provisions to expand the use of American iron and steel and prevailing wage protections, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will help create good paying jobs across industries and bolster domestic manufacturing.

Clean, safe drinking water is a fundamental human right and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides our nation with the necessary resources to take a long overdue step toward making safe drinking water a reality for all, including disadvantaged communities that have been disproportionately impacted by environmental contamination.

I appreciate all our witnesses for being here today including Newark's Water and Sewer Utilities Director Kareem Adeem. Thanks to Director Adeem's leadership, along with Mayor Baraka, Governor Murphy, and our Congressional delegation, Newark successfully completed the replacement of all of its lead lines earlier this year. I commend you for your work, Director Adeem.

We have an incredible opportunity in this moment to build resiliency and invest in the future of communities. We also have an opportunity to continue to work on a bipartisan basis to ensure these funds have a long-lasting impact. While this funding is a critical step in closing the resource gap for drinking water, there is much more we can and should do to ensure that every person can trust the water coming out of their tap.

Thank you.