

TESTIMONY OF

**MAYOR JOE KEEGAN**

ON BEHALF OF THE  
VILLAGE OF CASTLETON-ON-HUDSON

AND THE  
NEW YORK RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION

BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND THE ECONOMY  
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
(FEBRUARY 27, 2015)

Subject: *Safe Drinking Water Act issues related to small and rural drinking water utilities*

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Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, and my Congressman, good morning Congressman Tonko.

I am Joe Keegan, the mayor of a very charming little village a few miles south of Albany on the banks of the Hudson River called the Village of Castleton. We have a population of approximately 1,500 of the best people anywhere.

My village is a member of New York Rural Water Association, a non-profit organization of small and rural communities throughout the state which is somewhat responsible for my appearance here today. I got a call from the association on Monday asking about my availability and I just happened to be traveling back to Castleton last night from a trip related to my day job. Congressman Tonko knows this, but our part of New York is buried in snow and cold, and the other little village that was considering appearing, the Village of Delanson, said they could not come because the water department also has to plow the snow and they said they couldn't leave the plows even for Congress this week.

My village is very typical and representative of communities that have water supplies in New York and the rest of the country. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the state of New York has 2,305 community water systems, 2,203 serve populations under 10,000,

and, 2039 (88%) serve populations under 3,300. Correspondingly, the U.S. has 50,581 community water systems, 46,313 serve populations under 10,000, and 41,393 (82%) serve populations under 3,300. All of us small community water and sewer utilities have to comply with the same regulations, testing, and certifications as the biggest cities – but with only our very small rate-payer base. And we have to operate, maintain, and update our water infrastructure with very small budgets.

As a small community mayor, my number one concern and worry is drinking water and number two is wastewater – and everything else is a distance third. If there is a problem with the drinking water, it has to be addressed immediately, middle of the night, middle of the winter, it doesn't matter when. Every citizen and especially the most vulnerable depend on the safety of the water, including families with infants, schools, our nursing homes, and people with compromised immune systems. We can't have any potential contamination of the drinking water. Similarly, our sewer needs to function properly to avoid any possibility of a sewage spill or sewage back-up into people's homes.

I would say to you that this really does keep me up at night. Just last week, the frost penetrated the ground so deeply that we experienced two ruptures in our water mains that are 5-6 feet underground. This forced us to issue a boil water advisory where we have tell families they have to boil the water, as well as contact all the schools, the press, the nursing home, etc. – I actually call as many citizens as I can by robo-call. When something like this occurs, we are doing nothing but managing the situation around the clock and trying to resolve the situation, find the equipment to excavate the frozen ground, repair the water line, get the tests to the lab, and wait for all-clear results to lift the boil order. Every additional hour of having to boil their water is a serious hardship on a family. School drinking fountains have to be covered. Pallets of bottle of water have to be procured and delivered. Some acutely impacted homes have to move to hotels, friends, or family. My village and every small community wants to take every measure possible to avoid this situation and protect the public – our citizens.

We appreciate the assistance of this Subcommittee and the Congress in helping us protect the public and successfully operate the public drinking water and wastewater supply through the various funding programs and the on-site technical assistance initiatives. My village relies on this assistance.

I want to thank Congressman Tonko for sponsoring the “Assistance, Quality, and Affordability Act of 2014,” in the last Congress. Small and rural communities support your legislation because it enhanced the current drinking water state revolving fund by further targeting the funding to communities most in need, included grants and not just loans for small communities who can’t afford to repay loans (like mine), expanded the technical assistance initiatives that small communities depend on, and attempted to simplify the process to small communities so they can better understand the process and secure funding.

We do need help; most everything from financing, regulations, compliance, and the various programs is very complicated for small communities. We don’t have financial professionals on staff and often don’t understand many of the funding processes. Consequently, small communities often fail to exploit some of the funding programs like the state revolving funds. Currently, my community does not have any financing through these funds. We desperately need funding, and I could not tell you exactly why we don’t have access to these funds.

We currently have needs approaching 3 million dollars for our wastewater system. We need new aeration tanks, new sludge drying equipment, and new pumps as our facility is 30 years-old. We need to stop rain water from leaking in the system and overtaxing our capacity. We need to update the process of injecting air into our aeration tanks, and replace the old roof on the plant. My water operator is constantly explaining to me the need for these upgrades and his concerns of possible failure. However, we really don’t have a way to finance it. It would triple the sewer rates to take out a loan for that much. We just financed a new storage tank for the drinking water for 800,000 dollars using municipal bonding and we’ll have to pay that off. You can see in the picture at the back of my testimony that we have some very old drinking water pipes that need updating or replacing at a substantial cost. The one in the picture is stamped with a date from the 19th century – and they are still in the ground in parts of the village. It is said these pipes came over from France as the ballast of ships and we purchased them for the water. We are concerned that without more water line replacement we are vulnerable to more breaks and crises. And you can see the other picture of a tuberculated pipe we recently dug up that is loaded with corrosion and deposits to the point it is almost occluded. We need to replace these water mains. We recently had to repair a road over one of these mains, which I desperately wanted to replace – and the road work presented a convenient time to excavate and replace the main. However, the reality of our situation was the main replacement would

have cost 2 million dollars. We couldn't afford it, and we used all of state road allocation to resurface the road which means we can't disturb the road for 10 years.

In my remaining time, I want to emphasize the essential assistance we receive from New York Rural Water Association technical assistance and explain why it is so helpful. The association has circuit riders that are on call throughout the state that will come and assist us immediately including evenings and weekends. The circuit riders are all experts in the technical side of water operations. Just a week ago, we called for help for locating a water leak from a ruptured pipe that could have occurred over any part of the 150 foot water line. The circuit rider has specialized equipment that can detect noises and vibrations underground to locate the exact location of a break – where we need to excavate. This saves our village significantly in road disturbance. We can't afford to own the equipment and the circuit rider is an expert in using it – this saves us thousands of dollars and time. We have had their source water protection circuit rider assist us with compliance with the EPA mandate to delineate our source water area which saved us thousands in consultant fees. The wastewater circuit rider has analyzed the necessary repairs to our wastewater system and helped us prioritize the upgrades. My operators receive 90% of the training needed to retain their operators' licenses from New York Rural Water Association. My operators are so appreciative of the assistance funded through the Congressional appropriations process because the rural water circuit riders are always there and always available. We depend on them just like every other small community.

Mr. Chairman, I have a lot more to say, but you have been very charitable with your time and attention to small and rural communities – and on behalf of every small town elected official, we are grateful. Thank you from hearing from us and I will be happy to answer any questions.

## Water break, Stimpson and Second Streets



## #10 Seaman Avenue, 8 inch main, replaced

