



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **WEF Calls on Congress to Support Water Utilities and Customers in Coronavirus Relief Legislation**

Alexandria, VA – As Congress considers another coronavirus relief package, the Water Environment Federation (WEF) is calling for funding to help utilities rebound from the pandemic and invest in critical infrastructure, as well as to assist low-income customers pay bills.

The country's 50,000 drinking water and 15,000 wastewater utilities have the vital public responsibility of supplying the public with safe drinking water, wastewater service, and water recycling services every second of every day and continued without interruption during the during the coronavirus pandemic.

In addition to WEF, the letter to Congress was also signed by the American Water Works Association, Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies, National Association of Clean Water Agencies, National Rural Water Association, and WateReuse Association.

#### **Provide Funding to Help Local Water Utilities Rebound from the Pandemic and Invest in Critical Infrastructure**

The coronavirus pandemic is having a severe impact on water and wastewater utilities across the country, with some systems suffering pandemic-induced revenue losses of millions of dollars, or more than 15 percent. These lost revenues mean local communities are less able to renew, repair, and sustain aging water infrastructure and treatment facilities.

To address these needs, the sector requests that local water and wastewater systems be made explicitly eligible to receive a portion of any state and local budgetary assistance that is included in future coronavirus response legislation. This funding should go beyond the aid delivered in the CARES Act, which covered some direct COVID-response costs but prohibited the use of funds to offset lost utility revenues.

#### **Help Low-income Customers Pay Their Water Bills**

Each version of the HEROES Act approved by the House of Representatives this year contained language to establish a \$1.5 billion Low-Income Household Drinking Water

and Wastewater Assistance program, which would provide funds to utilities to offset water rates charged to low-income customers during the pandemic. Water systems report that delinquent residential water accounts have increased dramatically over the past several months – especially among low-income customers – so this type of targeted assistance is vital to getting these vulnerable customers back on track while also providing a needed stream of operational funds to water and wastewater systems.

### **Avoid Efforts to Implement Broad Water Service Disconnection Moratoriums**

Utilities understand it is critical to provide water service to communities during the pandemic. In fact, data from the American Water Works Association reports that more than 90% of drinking water systems temporarily suspended water service disconnections for nonpayment during the crisis, and most are also halting late payment fees. Water and sewer costs are overwhelmingly covered by local ratepayers, meaning that forgiveness for unpaid bills or free service extended to some customers needs to be ultimately covered by other customers. If Congress is committed to ensuring water access for all, it must provide federal assistance.

[Read the letter to Congress here.](#)

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### **About WEF**

The Water Environment Federation (WEF) is a not-for-profit technical and educational organization of 35,000 individual members and 75 affiliated Member Associations representing water quality professionals around the world. Since 1928, WEF and its members have protected public health and the environment. As a global water sector leader, our mission is to connect water professionals; enrich the expertise of water professionals; increase the awareness of the impact and value of water; and provide a platform for water sector innovation. To learn more, visit [www.wef.org](http://www.wef.org).