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October 18, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
Washington, DC

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
House Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

RE: Disaster Recovery Funding for Water and Wastewater Infrastructure, Resilient Design, and Temporary Waivers for Certified Operators

Dear President Trump and Congressional Leaders;

The devastation caused by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria to American citizens is heartbreaking and alarming. The Water Environment Federation (WEF) and its 34,000 members are very concerned about those impacted by the hurricanes and now struggling with the aftermath. While recovery will take time, and will not be easy, we have seen following Hurricane Katrina and Super Storm Sandy, that recovery is not only possible but can offer an opportunity to make the impacted area more resilient.

As you know, the hurricanes severely damaged or destroyed the drinking water and wastewater treatment systems in many communities. It may have been impossible to prevent those systems from failing due to the severity of the storms, but it is possible to rebuild them in ways that will reduce future risks and safeguard public health and environmental impacts. As you develop policies and provide funding to help communities recover, WEF strongly urges you to take three important steps:

- Provide robust grant or very low-interest loan funding for the damaged drinking water and wastewater systems;
- Direct or urge utilities receiving federal funding to incorporate greater resilience in the design and location of the systems, and;
- Support mutual aid efforts within the water sector to make disaster response more effective by placing the water sector under its own Emergency Support Function (ESF).

WEF is the technical and professional association for the men and women in the United States and worldwide building and operating Water Resource Recovery Facilities (a.k.a. wastewater treatment facilities) and stormwater management systems. Our members also work in the private sector, for water technology providers, and in research and academia. They are on the front lines of the challenges communities face maintaining and operating treatment infrastructure.

The water sector has embraced resilience and efficiency as best management practices. Greater resilience ensures that taxpayer dollars are used wisely, and systems perform to standards that protect public health, the environment, and promote economic growth.

WEF members include water professionals in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico who were directly impacted by the hurricanes, and are/will be directly involved with the recovery and rebuilding processes. Restoring water supply and wastewater treatment service following a disaster is clearly vital to recovery. The size and scope of these storms demonstrate the need for drinking water and wastewater professionals from other parts of the nation to be able to readily provide their professional expertise to help quickly restore services.

In early 2017 a workgroup of representatives from the water and wastewater sectors consisting of utilities, state and federal regulators, water associations, and private companies issued the "Roadmap to a Secure and Resilient Water and Wastewater Sector". The roadmap was a joint effort of the Water Sector Coordinating Council (WSCC) and the Water Government Coordinating Council (WGCC) chartered to review key threats and vulnerabilities of the sector, and to formulate Top Priority Activity Areas and associated near-term and mid-term actions to address gaps.

The top priorities identified in the roadmap include the need to:

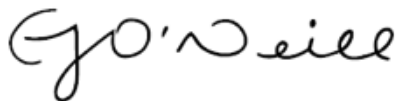
- Establish the critical lifeline status of the water and wastewater sector and translate that definition into strong support for the sector's needs and capabilities.
- Improve detection, response, and recovery to contamination incidents.
- Advance preparedness and improve capabilities of the water and wastewater sector for area-wide loss of water and power.
- Advance recognition of vulnerabilities and needed responses related to cyber risk management.

Under the priorities identified, the water and wastewater sector would like to improve the efficiency and efficacy of response under the National Response Framework where current practice segments water response needs into multiple ESFs (primarily ESFs 3, 4, 6, and 8) with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). An ESF for the water sector would assist in establishing and improving site access protocol for critical lifeline services through coordination with FEMA and other emergency response agencies, as well as state and local authorities.

The Water and Wastewater Agency Response Network (WARN) is a mutual aid and assistance program that provides great value to the sector through resource sharing among utilities. Mutual aid agreements are in place prior to disasters accelerating resource sharing during and after the disasters. With regard to personnel, however, there is much to be done to ensure ease of access for utility operators during disasters -- in part the sector being placed under a single ESF would assist in this regard.

In the disaster supplemental appropriations and future funding for recovering efforts, WEF urges you to provide robust funding for water and wastewater systems and that priority should be placed on resilient design. WEF also requests that Congress and the Administration act to remove any restrictions that prevent certified drinking water and wastewater operators from providing assistance in a disaster area. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Eileen J. O'Neill, Ph.D.

Executive Director

Water Environment Federation