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May 28, 2021

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Chairman
Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Grace F. Napolitano
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Water Resources
and Environment
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

**RE: WEF Letter of Support for H.R. 1915, The Water Quality Protection & Jobs
Creation Act of 2021**

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Chairwoman Napolitano,

Thank you for this opportunity for Water Environment Federation (WEF) to provide this letter of support for H.R. 1915, the Water Quality Protection and Job Creation Act of 2021. WEF¹ is the educational and technical association for over 34,000 water professionals, maintaining and improving water quality and public health in communities across the country and around the world. This legislation helps address WEF's top policy priorities to increase funding for water infrastructure, address water workforce development needs, improve resilience to climate change, increase system sustainability, and improve environmental equity for all Americans.

There is tremendous national need for increased funding and financing resources to help communities and utilities to assess, repair, replace, and maintain the aging wastewater and stormwater infrastructure that protects public health and the environment. WEF is pleased that H.R. 1915 will substantially increase funding levels for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) program over the next five years. It will also expand the additional subsidization to 30% to help financially disadvantaged communities. WEF is also supportive of increasing the Green Project Reserve to 15% because there remains considerable nation-wide need and great potential to implement more green infrastructure in these financially disadvantaged communities, while encouraging energy efficiency and recovery projects at Water Resource Recovery Facilities.

WEF also supports Section 12 of the draft bill, giving State SRF programs the authority to use up to 1% of the federal capitalization grant for water workforce development. This will significantly help utilities and states work together to address current and looming water workforce shortages. The municipal drinking water, wastewater and stormwater management sectors are facing a massive workforce replacement need and offers significant job growth potential. The high rate of retirements and aging workforce in the sector are placing pressure on utilities to find the next generation of workers to replace them. An estimated 30% to 50% of utility workers will retire over the next decade, taking with them

tremendous professional knowledge and experience (WRF/AWWA, “Water Sector Workforce Sustainability Initiative,” 2010). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there will be an estimated 75,000 to 80,000 jobs available within utilities over the next six years. These are Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) cluster jobs that do not require a bachelor’s degree and pay family-sustaining wages. They cannot be outsourced and are largely immune to economic externalities. And as we’ve witnessed during the pandemic, these are essential jobs that protect public health and the environment, on par with other first responder jobs within communities. These jobs are in every city and county across the nation, and are long-term careers that provide excellent healthcare and retirement benefits.

In addition, WEF strongly supports the bill’s provisions to provide increased funding through the EPA Sewer Overflow & Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grants program. The expansion of this program will help communities resolve combined sewer overflow and municipal stormwater problems, which disproportionately impact lower-income, historically disadvantaged communities. In February, WEF released the findings of the WEF Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Needs Survey², which identified a stormwater infrastructure funding gap of \$8.5 billion annually. In March, ASCE released their first-ever Stormwater Infrastructure Report Card, giving stormwater infrastructure a letter grade of D. Investing in our nation’s CSOs and municipal stormwater infrastructure is critical as we strive to make communities more resilient to climate change and address historic environmental inequities.

Congratulations on developing a much needed and comprehensive bill. WEF strongly endorses H.R. 1915 and we are standing by to offer any additional assistance needed to get it enacted into law.

Sincerely,



Walter Marlowe, P.E., CAE

Executive Director

Water Environment Federation

¹ The Water Environment Federation (WEF) is a global nonprofit organization of water quality professionals. For more than 90 years, WEF has provided premier education and the latest technical expertise to the water sector. WEF pursues solutions to today’s critical water sector challenges, including infrastructure funding, water affordability, and workforce sustainability and diversity. WEF advances innovation and technology and promotes the circular economy through water reuse, nutrient recovery, and energy conservation and generation. With worldwide members and partners, WEF supports the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals and is a proud partner of UN Water. Each year WEF organizes WEFTEC, the world’s largest annual water quality exhibition and conference. To learn more, visit www.wef.org.

² <https://stormwater.wef.org/2021/03/2020-ms4-survey-highlights-stormwater-funding-needs/>