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March 23, 2021

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper
Chairman
Committee on Environment
& Public Works
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment
& Public Works
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C.

RE: Letter of Support and Comments for the draft Drinking Water & Wastewater Infrastructure Act of 2021

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Capito:

The Water Environment Federation (WEF) welcomes the opportunity to provide a stakeholder letter of support for the draft Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act (DWWIA) of 2021. WEF¹ is the educational and technical association for over 34,000 water professionals working to maintain and improve water quality and public health in communities across the country and around the world.

WEF strongly supports the draft legislation and congratulates the Committee on putting forth a bill that will advance many of the water infrastructure funding and policy priorities our members have been advocating for over the years. This letter details those provisions in the draft legislation that WEF would like included in the final bill, as well as specific changes to some of those provisions that will ensure that those programs best address our nation's water infrastructure needs.

As the Committee knows, the national need for improvements to drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure is substantial and there is broad support by the American public for increased federal funding to assist communities protect public health, the environment, and spur economic growth. A Value of Water Coalition survey² of public opinion found that 84% of Americans support increased federal investment to rebuild our water infrastructure.

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 <http://thevalueofwater.org/resources>

The coronavirus crisis has further highlighted the essential role that reliable water infrastructure, water professionals, and water utilities play in protecting communities. Every day our water utilities work to keep pathogens out of the environment by safely collecting and transporting wastewater from homes and businesses and then fully reclaiming and cleaning to meet strict standards. The policies and priorities set forth in DWWIA will ensure that communities have the long-term tools and resources needed to serve their communities' water infrastructure needs.

Section 210 – Clean Water State Revolving Fund Reauthorization

Our members, our state-based Member Associations, and WEF have long been strong advocates for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CW SRF), including supporting the creation of the program in 1987. The CW SRF program is one of the most successful federal infrastructure funding programs ever, and it is critical that Congress reauthorize it and increase the authorized fund levels to help address our national needs. Combined federal, state and local spending on water infrastructure equals about \$41 billion per year, leaving an estimated national water infrastructure investment gap of \$82 billion per year. If current needs are left unaddressed, the annual gap is projected to rise to \$109 billion by 2026 and \$153 billion by 2040. The proposed authorization levels in the draft DWWIA bill are greatly appreciated, and WEF urges the Committee to maintain those funding levels, if not increase them, as the bill proceeds through the legislative process.

The current national economic situation makes the economic and job-creation benefits of increased CW SRF more relevant than ever before. A report³ produced by WEF and the WaterReuse Association for this Committee in 2016 found that the return on investment for increased federal CW SRF funding produces significant job creation, federal revenue generation, and GDP benefits. The report found that \$1 million in federal SRF capitalization grant funding generates 16.5 new high-paying jobs (~\$60,000/yr. salary), \$930,000 in federal tax revenues, and nearly \$3 million in direct GDP and over \$6 million in in-direct GDP.

Section 204 – Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grants

Reauthorization and increased funding for the Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grants will help the thousands of communities across the nation dealing with aging and inadequate combined sewer, separate sewer, and stormwater collections and conveyance infrastructure. These grants will not only help communities meet their regulatory obligation, it will also address public safety and resiliency priorities that are becoming increasingly common in communities of all sizes and geographic regions.

Section 211 – Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Grants

WEF strongly supports the workforce development provisions included in the draft DWWIA legislation. As the nation has seen during the coronavirus crisis, the work that water professionals do to protect public health is critical, both not just during times of crisis, but every day in every community in the United States. Unfortunately, the municipal drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater management sectors are all facing substantial workforce replacement needs.

³ <https://bit.ly/wef-wra-srf-economic-impact-study-report-april-29-2016>

The aging workforce and high rate of retirement in the sector are placing pressure on utilities to find the next generation of workers. 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 permanent 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. These are jobs that protect public health and the environment, on par with other essential first responder jobs within communities. These jobs are in every city and county across the nation and are long-term careers that provide healthcare and retirement benefits. As our nation recovers from the coronavirus crisis, bringing the next generation of water professionals into careers in water will help communities with unemployment challenges, in addition to addressing current and future workforce needs in the sector.

WEF Recommendation: Include legislative language allowing for drinking water and wastewater utilities and agencies to be explicitly eligible to apply for grants, similar to the language in the draft bill making municipal public works departments eligible to receive grants. Many drinking water and wastewater agencies are independent public authorities, and would not be eligible through the public works department eligibility in the draft bill.

Section 217 – Stormwater Infrastructure Technology

The inclusion of these provisions in DWWIA is strongly supported by WEF. Several of the proposals in this section align with the recommendations that WEF released in our annual Stormwater Policy Recommendations⁴ to Congress. The need for federal support for stormwater infrastructure and resources is illustrated by findings in the 2020 WEF National Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Needs Assessment Survey⁵. The survey found that aging infrastructure, lack of funding, and increasing or expanding regulations were by far the top areas of concern for stormwater permittees. It also found that the estimated annual funding gap for stormwater is \$8.5B. Additionally, the American Society of Civil Engineers recently released their first-ever Stormwater Infrastructure Report Card and gave the nation’s stormwater infrastructure a letter grade of D.

The provisions included in DWWIA will help address many of the fundamental challenges facing the stormwater sector, including identifying and verifying the best stormwater management practices and technologies so that federal, state or local funds are spent effectively and regulatory goals are met.

WEF Recommendation: WEF recommends eliminating Section 217(c)(4)(A)(i) because it will prioritize grant funding for Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) systems over Municipal Separate Storm Sewer (MS4) and non-regulated stormwater infrastructure systems. Removal of Section

⁴ <http://www.wef.org/2020-stormwater-policy-recommendations>

⁵ <https://wefstormwaterinstitute.org/programs/ms4survey/>

217(c)(4)(A)(i) will give the EPA the flexibility to provide grant funding to all types of communities and all types of innovative projects that can be replicated in similar situations. While CSO systems are a significant concern for many communities, nationwide there are equally substantial MS4 and non-regulated stormwater infrastructure challenges and needs, particularly in small and medium sized communities and economically distressed urban centers.

Section 202 – Wastewater Efficiency Grant Pilot Program

WEF strongly supports Section 202, the Wastewater Efficiency Grant Pilot Program. Several years back WEF and other water organizations recognized that the staid model for treating wastewater did not reflect the tremendous opportunity that utilizing more advanced treatment processes has for recovering and using the energy, nutrients, and water resources available in wastewater. For this reason, the sector has renamed wastewater treatment facilities as Water Resource Recovery Facilities (WRRFs). Energy recovery from wastewater treatment is being employed by many WRRFs that have the financial stability and technical resources to make investments in these technologies. Unfortunately, not all, particularly small, rural, and financially disadvantaged WRRFs, have been unable to install these technologies.

In 2018, WEF created the ReNEW Water Project⁶ to establish baseline metrics for resource recovery of energy, nutrients, and water from WRRFs. WRRFs in the United States can generate 859 megawatts annually, of which 350 megawatts can be recovered and used for wastewater treatment operations. With the proper infrastructure, biogas recovery through anaerobic digestion can produce energy that reduces the reliance on fossil fuels used in wastewater treatment, as part of a circular economy approach to wastewater treatment supported by WEF's ReNEW Water Project.

The US Environmental Protection Agency estimated that 1,351 WRRFs in the U.S. have a capacity larger than 1 million gallons per day (mgd) and have anaerobic digestion capabilities that will produce significant energy if investments in biogas energy generation infrastructure are made. Section 202 will provide the operators of those WRRFs, such as municipal governments and public utilities, a substantial new source of funding to help them make those necessary infrastructure investments. In particular, this section will support the many smaller and medium sized WRRFs that lack larger ratepayer bases and the financial resources to make investments in biogas energy generation infrastructure.

Additional DWWIA Provisions WEF Supports

Draft DWWIA contains several other sections that WEF strongly supports and our members will urge their Senators to also support when the bill is considered on the floor. In particular, but not limited to, WEF backs the following provisions:

- **Section 201 – Research, Investigations, Training, and Information**
- **Section 203 – Pilot Program for Alternative Water Source Projects**
- **Section 205 – Clean Water Infrastructure Resiliency and Sustainability Program**
- **Section 206 – Small & Medium POTW Circuit Rider Program**
- **Section 207 – Small Publicly Owned Treatment Works Efficiency Grant Program**

⁶ <https://www.wef.org/resources/topics/browse-topics-o-z/resource-recovery-roadmaps/renew-water-project/>

- **Section 209 – Connection to Publicly Owned Treatment Works**
- **Section 213 – Water Data Sharing Pilot Program**
- **Section 215 & 214 – WIFIA Reauthorization and Final Rating Opinion Letters**
- **Section 216 – Small and Disadvantaged Community Analysis:** WEF supports this provision and also strongly supports the establishment of a permanent, well-funded program to assist low-income ratepayers.

Please take into consideration the recommendations made in these comments, and we welcome the opportunity to elaborate further upon them if necessary. Please contact Steve Dye, WEF Legislative Director, at sdye@wef.org or 202-246-1070 for additional information.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Walter Marlowe", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Walter Marlowe, P.E., CAE
Executive Director
Water Environment Federation