



Funding Priorities to Advance an Equitable Water Future For Great Lakes Cities

Presented by the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative's Mayors Commission on Water Equity

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Water is a cornerstone of healthy communities and thriving economies. Yet, from coast to coast, communities are buckling under the costs of aging, failing water infrastructure, with low-income and communities of color shouldering a disproportionate share of the burden. With renewed urgency and attention, Congress has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to ensure every American has safe, reliable water and wastewater services.

The Mayors Commission on Water Equity calls on Congress to make the following investments:

- ***\$1 billion to map all lead service lines.*** The Lead and Copper Rule revisions finalized in December 2020 require public water systems do a full inventory of their service lines to understand which properties may be at greater risk of lead exposure. Congress should fully fund the complete mapping of all lead service lines in the United States, on both public and private property, so stakeholders are fully aware of the scope of the lead problem. Congress should also include resources for technical assistance for low-income communities to gain access to and deploy this federal funding.
- ***\$58 billion to create a cross-agency “Lead Safe Communities” fund, with \$46 billion to replace lead pipes and \$12 billion to address other sources of lead.*** To affordably address lead service lines on both public and private property, this fund will support state programs to identify and replace lead plumbing, fixtures, and paint in homes and schools, and augment funding for interim corrosion control treatment measures. This fund should include funding directly to low-income homeowners to replace privately-owned lead service lines and in-home lead sources, as well as to utilities through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund to replace privately-owned lead service lines where consistent with state law. Funding should be accessible to small and mid-size communities with fewer resources, and Congress should consider waiving local match requirements as applicable.
- ***\$8 billion to create a permanent Low-Income Household Drinking Water and Wastewater Emergency Assistance Program.*** Congress should create a new permanent assistance program to meet the full needs of low-income customers and the utilities that serve them. Congress should also provide technical assistance so that communities with the greatest needs can access funding and administer assistance programs.
- ***\$100 million in technical assistance to support utilities with equitable rate design.*** The upfront costs of changing utility rate structures or implementing assistance programs as stopgap measures are high and can prevent utilities from pursuing more equitable rate designs that ensure all residents have access to water services regardless of income. Congress should create a program and provide technical assistance grants to help utilities create and administer customer assistance programs and design more equitable rate structures within the confines of relevant state laws.

- ***\$10 million to expand the Water Workforce Development grants program.*** Congress established the Federal Water Workforce Development Grants as a pilot program several years ago. Now that the program is up and running, Congress should make it permanent and expand funding to invest in targeted internship, apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and post-secondary bridge programs. These funds should be targeted to nonprofits, educational institutions, and utilities that have high retirement rates and are located in areas with high unemployment, large low-income populations, rural areas, and large communities of color underrepresented in the water workforce.
- ***Focus the \$56 billion modernization plan on climate resilient water infrastructure.*** The Biden Administration’s American Jobs Plan calls for \$56 billion in grants and low-cost flexible loans to modernize aging drinking water, stormwater, and wastewater systems. That funding should be explicitly focused on building climate resilience rather than reinforcing the same ill-prepared systems that disproportionately impose water-related climate burdens on low-income and communities of color.

Mayors Commission on Water Equity

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About the Mayors Commission on Water Equity

The mission of the Mayors Commission on Water Equity is to advise the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative on issues, opportunities, and solutions to water equity challenges facing Great Lakes and St. Lawrence cities. The Commission seeks to deepen the Cities Initiative’s understanding of the water equity issues and recommend a Mayor’s Policy Agenda for Water Equity to strengthen water equity for all residents, with specific focus on communities that face significant challenges in receiving clean, safe and affordable drinking water.

About the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is a binational coalition of close to 100 U.S. and Canadian mayors and local officials working to advance the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. The Cities Initiative and local officials integrate environmental, economic and social agendas and sustain a resource that represents approximately 80 percent of North America’s surface freshwater supply, provides drinking water for 40 million people and is the foundation upon which a strong regional economy is based.