



GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE
CITIES INITIATIVE
L'ALLIANCE DES VILLES
DES GRANDS LACS ET DU SAINT-LAURENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Coastal Resilience and Water Equity reports from Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative identify significant funding needs and increased federal investment

CHICAGO, September 10, 2021 – Reports on coastal resilience and water equity from the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative show significant needs of our communities. We applaud funding provided by the bipartisan infrastructure bill passed by the U.S. Senate in August, and call on Congress to provide additional support in future legislation to meet the long-standing needs of our residents and communities. These needs include support for water affordability, lead line removal, urban flooding, and shoreline mitigation.

The Infrastructure Bill and Water Equity

"We welcome the investments outlined in the bipartisan infrastructure bill, which will provide us with the solid foundation we need in order to address the water equity challenges facing Chicago, other Great Lakes cities and communities across the country," said Mayor Lightfoot of Chicago. "As Congress considers additional investments as part of the reconciliation package, I encourage a renewed focus on water equity and safe drinking water to meet the significant needs of our residents."

"The biggest gap is the inadequate funding for lead service line replacement," said Mayor Duggan of Detroit. "The initial intention of the President's plan was to cover 100% of the funds needed to remove lead lines, but the bill passed in the Senate does not come close to the financial need." The Senate bill includes \$15 billion for lead line mitigation, while the estimated cost is \$40-\$60 billion to remove all lead water lines nationally.

“Our cities simply cannot afford to cover a potential \$45 billion gap in funding,” said Mayor McKinney of Zion, IL and Chair of the Cities Initiative’s Mayors Commission on Water Equity. “The children in our communities deserve clean and affordable water now. We ask that Congress and the President take action to fill the funding gap for lead line removal as soon as possible.”

In addition, the Senate infrastructure bill authorizes -- but does not fund -- several programs to address other water equity challenges. These challenges include:

- Low income water assistance
- Lead removal in schools
- Water workforce development
- Climate resilience for water utilities

The Infrastructure Bill and Coastal Resilience

The Senate infrastructure bill also provides funding for several programs that will help strengthen resilience in coastal communities, including at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Army Corps of Engineers, and FEMA, among others.

“The Cities Initiative welcomes the \$500 million provided for the STORM Act, a new program passed by Congress in January 2021,” said Mayor Schember of Erie, Pennsylvania.

The bill authorizes FEMA to work with states to establish revolving loan programs for local governments to carry out mitigation projects that reduce risks from natural disasters, including flooding, shoreline erosion, and rising water levels.

Overall, however, the bill’s funding levels will not meet the projected need in the Great Lakes region, or nationally, to address increasingly severe impacts from climate change, including more frequent storms, acute shoreline erosion, and more rapid fluctuation of water levels on the Great Lakes.

“Our cities have been severely impacted by shoreline erosion,” said Mayor Sorenson of Sheboygan, WI. “A recent survey conducted by our organization found that shoreline communities expect to spend more than \$2 billion over next five years combating coastal damages from climate change. This is a conservative estimate and does not capture the full scope of the need facing local governments.”

To address this urgent need in the Great Lakes and across the country, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative calls for \$10 billion in the budget reconciliation process to help coastal communities prepare for climate change and safeguard infrastructure, businesses and homes in vulnerable shoreline areas. This reflects the request in Congress from the bipartisan House Oceans Caucus for a \$10 billion investment in coastal restoration and community resilience projects. More broadly, an interim report from the Cities Initiative’s Mayors Advisory Council on Coastal Resilience has identified needs for the region. The Council was organized in January 2021 to convene mayors and problem solve around the basin’s most pressing coastal resilience challenges,

with a current focus on shoreline erosion. The coastal needs outlined by the Council encompass four key areas:

- 1) Coordinated Planning and Comprehensive Solutions
Nature-based solutions; regional planning and coordination; intergovernmental collaboration; long-term planning; informed decision-making.
- 2) Broad Engagement and Strategic Education Needs
Nature based education; connection to coastal resources; private engagement; Great Lakes awareness.
- 3) Operational Tools and Complete Data Needs
Data accessibility; data gaps; decision support tools; best practices for resilience.
- 4) Supportive and Accessible Funding Needs
Off-setting funding deficiencies; cost-share requirements; funding guidance.

The Advisory Council will begin drafting recommendations this fall to address these challenges and plans to release its final report in early 2022.

About The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is a binational coalition of close to 135 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 to sustain a resource that represents approximately 80% 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.

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