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Cities Initiative Members Urge U.S. Government to Support Programs that Benefit Great Lakes Cities at Washington Lobby Day

The delegation of 13 U.S. and Canadian local elected leaders pressed the U.S. Congress to pass the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Act of 2024, securing funding for five more years to safeguard our freshwater resources

Washington, D.C. – March 8, 2024 – This week, more than a dozen U.S. and Canadian local elected leaders took part in a delegation, organized by the Cities Initiative, at Great Lakes Day in Washington, D.C. This annual gathering of regional organizations dedicated to protecting the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin gave the delegation the opportunity to advocate for key federal programs that benefit Great Lakes cities to U.S. lawmakers on Capitol Hill and senior federal officials.

The Cities Initiative delegation was comprised of local elected leaders from across the basin in the United States and Canada, including Mayor Ryan Sorenson (Sheboygan, Wisconsin); Mayor Cory Mason (Racine, Wisconsin); Mayor Bill Bazzi (Dearborn Heights, Michigan); Mayor Ken Johnson (Muskegon, Michigan); Mayor Sheldon Neeley (Flint, Michigan); Mayor Austin Bonta (Portage, Indiana); Mayor Shawyn Patterson-Howard (Mount Vernon, New York); Mayor Leon Rockingham, Jr. (North Chicago, Illinois); Mayor Ann Taylor (Waukegan, Illinois); Mayor Gino Moretti (Saint-Anicet, Quebec); Mayor Tom Mrakas (Aurora, Ontario); Mayor Bill Steele (Port Colborne, Ontario) and Reeve Bert Liverance (Township of the Archipelago, Ontario).

“The Cities Initiative delegation was proud to participate in Great Lakes Day and encourage Congress to pass the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Act of 2024,” said Gino Moretti, Mayor of Saint-Anicet and Chair of the Cities Initiative. “This vital piece of bipartisan legislation would continue GLRI efforts for an additional five years with an authorized funding level of \$500 million per year, safeguarding our freshwater resources and delivering much needed economic dividends to Great Lakes communities.”

Congress has provided \$5.54 billion to the GLRI since 2010, including \$1 billion via the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. A 2018 study by the University of Michigan found that every federal dollar invested in the GLRI between 2010 and 2016 would contribute approximately \$3.36 in ancillary, long-term economic activity to local economies through 2036.

The Cities Initiative delegation met with various elected representatives and senior officials, including U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (Wisconsin); U.S. Senator Gary Peters (Michigan); Major General Mark Quander, Commander, Great Lakes and Ohio River Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE); Mary Frances Repko, Deputy National Climate Advisor, the White House; Ambassador Nina Hachigian, Special Representative for City and State Diplomacy, U.S. Department of State and Adam Tindall-Schlicht, the Administrator of the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation, U.S. Department of Transportation. The Cities Initiative and the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative also held a joint dinner in Washington.

“Our delegation called on Congress to dramatically increase federal funding for the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds to \$3 billion per year,” said Mayor Shawyn Patterson-Howard of Mount Vernon, New York. “This is necessary to aid communities in financing green infrastructure projects, removing lead service lines and making overdue upgrades to water infrastructure in the face of climate change and other pressing challenges.”

The total authorization level for both the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds is \$3 billion annually, yet Congress has been providing far less than that – around \$1 billion – in appropriations legislation each year. A 2023 survey conducted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found that U.S. water utilities will need \$625 billion for upgrades to drinking water infrastructure alone in the next two decades.

“We urged Congress to approve 100 percent federal cost share for operations and maintenance of the Brandon Road Interbasin Project in the Water Resources Development Act of 2024,” said Mayor Ryan Sorenson of Sheboygan, Wisconsin. “The Great Lakes states should not be expected to shoulder this financial burden given the importance of Brandon Road to the ecological vitality of the Great Lakes and the economic success the United States and Canada.”

Illinois and Michigan have recently secured a combined \$114 million in state funding for the construction phase of Brandon Road. The costs of continued operations and maintenance could be significant, especially given recent inflation of costs with respect to USACE projects.

The full suite of the Cities Initiative’s U.S. federal priorities for 2024 are available at www.glslicities.org. Additionally, the Cities Initiative joined the Great Lakes Commission and other regional organizations on a joint statement advocating for shared federal priorities, which is also available at www.glslicities.org.

About the Cities Initiative

The Cities Initiative is a multinational coalition of local governments led by mayors and chief elected officers working collaboratively to safeguard the economic, environmental and social health of communities in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin. It is committed to stewarding the basin’s freshwater and ensuring that all residents have access to clean, safe and affordable water as the foundation for sustainable, vibrant, inclusive and resilient communities.

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