

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Launch Big City Caucus to Advance Shared Economic and Environmental Priorities

CHICAGO – September 21, 2026 – The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative today announced the launch of its new Big City Caucus, bringing together major U.S. and Canadian cities to work together on shared economic priorities and other issues affecting the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region.

The region's largest cities are on the front lines of major economic opportunities and challenges, from trade and infrastructure to economic transformation and freshwater protection. The Big City Caucus will give these cities a stronger collective voice to coordinate responses to major developments, advance shared priorities and help strengthen the economic relationship between the United States and Canada.

Participating cities in the Big City Caucus include Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, Toledo and Rochester in the United States, and Burlington, Kitchener, Laval, London, Mississauga, Montréal, Québec City, Toronto and Vaughan in Canada.

The idea for the Big City Caucus grew out of discussions among the mayors of Toronto, Milwaukee and Buffalo alongside the Cities Initiative's 2026 Annual Conference in Hamilton, Ontario. The caucus builds on those conversations by creating an ongoing opportunity for leaders of the region's largest cities to strengthen binational coordination at a pivotal time in the U.S.-Canada relationship.

"Toronto is deeply connected to cities across the Great Lakes and on both sides of the border," said Paul Ainslie, City of Toronto Councillor for Ward 24, Scarborough-Guildwood. "We share many of the same challenges and opportunities, from strengthening our economies to protecting the waters and communities that connect us. The Big City Caucus gives us a new way to work together, share solutions and build a stronger future for people throughout the region."

"The Great Lakes are central to Milwaukee's economy, environment and quality of life," said Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson. "Our region's major cities have an opportunity to work together to protect this shared resource while creating jobs, attracting investment and building stronger communities. The Big City Caucus will help us learn from one another and make the most of the opportunities we share."

"Buffalo's future is intrinsically tied to the Great Lakes and our connection with Canada. Lake Erie has shaped our history, drives our quality of life, and gives us a real economic advantage as we compete for new residents, businesses, and investment," Buffalo Mayor Sean Ryan said. "No city can protect this precious shared resource or realize its full potential alone. By working together across municipal, state, provincial, and national borders, we can keep our water clean, strengthen our relationship with Canada, and build a more resilient and prosperous Great Lakes economy."



Through the caucus, participating cities will coordinate on major developments affecting the region, identify and advance shared priorities and pursue opportunities for collaboration on issues affecting major urban communities throughout the region.

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About the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is a multinational coalition of municipal and Indigenous government executives representing communities in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region who are working to promote economic prosperity in our communities and protect our fresh water for the benefit of current and future generations. With more than 425 communities represented, the Cities Initiative is leading the way in advancing the environmental, economic, and social health of the region by addressing issues impacting its residents. The Cities Initiative is comprised of a U.S. organization and a Canadian organization. In September 2025, the Cities Initiative launched its [*Economic Transformation Action Plan: A Blueprint for Economic Growth and Freshwater Stewardship in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region.*](#)

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