

Rural Water Issues Advisory [3/18/2019]

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Another Opportunity for House of Representatives Members to Support Small and Rural Communities - and State Rural Water Associations: On Friday, four House Members from New York and Hawaii circulated "Dear Colleague" letters in support of rural water funding priorities. All House Members are welcome to show support and cosign the letters (below).

From: e-Dear Colleague <e-dearcolleague@housemail.house.gov>

Sent: Friday, March 15, 2019 4:42 PM

Subject: e-DearColleague: Support Small and Rural Water Projects - FY20 Rural Water Approps Letters

Support Funding for Small and Rural Water Projects

FY 20 Programmatic Requests

Endorsing Organization: Rural Water Association

DEADLINE: COB March 25

Dear Colleague:

Please join us in urging the Agriculture and Interior Appropriations Subcommittees to include robust funding for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Water and Sewer Loan and Grant program, the Circuit Rider program, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) Grassroots Source Water Protection program, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – Safe Drinking Water Act and Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems Assistance Act technical assistance in their FY 2020 appropriations bill.

Small and rural communities have an important public responsibility of complying with all applicable federal Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act regulations in order to supply the public with safe drinking water and sanitation. Most U.S. water utilities are small; over 91 percent of the country's 50,259 drinking water systems serve communities with fewer than 10,000 people and approximately 80 percent of the country's over 16,000 wastewater systems serve fewer than 10,000 people.

Unfortunately, due to limited economies of scale and lack of technical expertise, small and rural communities often have difficulty complying with federal mandates. USDA's Water and Sewer Loan and Grant, Circuit Rider, FSA Grassroots Source Water Protection, and EPA technical assistance programs are essential in helping small and rural communities overcome their limitations in providing safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation.

Please join us in signing onto two letters (text below) by contacting Jennifer Wood on Rep. Katko's staff at Jennifer.Wood@mail.house.gov, Dave Chun on Rep. Gabbard's staff at Dave.Chun@mail.house.gov, Laura Driscoll on Rep. Delgado's staff at Laura.Driscoll@mail.house.gov, or Patrick Hester on Rep. Stefanik's staff at Patrick.Hester@mail.house.gov. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

John Katko
Member of Congress

Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress

Antonio Delgado
Member of Congress

Elise M. Stefanik
Member of Congress

Interior Letter:

Dear Chair McCollum and Ranking Member Joyce:

We respectfully urge the subcommittee to make funding to assist small and rural communities comply with federal regulations a priority in the fiscal year 2020 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency budget.

Specifically, please fully fund (\$15,000,000) the Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems Assistance Act (Public Law 114-98) and fund the recently enacted on-site technical assistance initiative, §4103, "Technical Assistance for Treatment Works," in the America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 with \$13,000,000 in fiscal year 2020.

Small and rural communities have an important public responsibility of complying with all applicable federal Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act regulations in order to supply the public safe drinking water, sanitation and protection of our waters.

Most U.S. wastewater utilities are small; over 80 percent of the country's over 15,000 publicly owned wastewater treatment utilities serve fewer than 10,000 people. Similarly, most U.S. drinking water utilities are small; over 91 percent of the country's approximately 50,000 drinking water systems serve communities with fewer than 10,000 persons. These communities, many of which are small and rural communities, often have difficulty providing safe and affordable drinking and water and sanitation due to limited economies of scale and lack of technical expertise.

Unfortunately, due to limited economies of scale and lack of technical expertise, small and rural communities often have difficulty complying with the federal Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act mandates. This on-site technical assistance effort is essential in helping small and rural communities overcome their limitations in protecting our water resources and providing safe public sanitation. The type of assistance authorized under the Acts is on-site services provided by circuit rider-type technicians or technicians who can provide in-field services shared within a state. The circuit rider concept was designed by Congress to allow small communities access to technical expertise that is available to larger communities. Each community's water infrastructure is unique, which means technical assistance must be available to address a community's particular problem.

These small public water systems and the community they serve rely on on-site technical assistance for meeting federal training regulations, complying with EPA regulations, navigating EPA fines, and operating their drinking water utilities. Of the billions of dollars provided to EPA by Congress each year, smaller communities who lack access or resources to obtain this kind of technical expertise will tell you the most benefit comes from the dollars provided to on-site technical assistance provided by circuit riders. In addition, the value of this funding is amplified as these staff members often educate and train others to maintain these water systems.

All communities want to ensure quality water and stay in compliance, and this is more easily achieved with the necessary technical resources that this funding would provide communities with small public water systems. Some communities have just one person available to provide this technical assistance, so this funding is critical in ensuring access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation.

For these on-site assistance providers to be effective and helpful, they must be available to travel directly to any given community to work specifically with a community's unique water or wastewater treatment and personally educate that operator, mayor, or other local officials on how to solve their particular problem. They have to be available when the community needs the help which can be nights, winters, after natural disasters, weekends, etc. Also, they must be non-regulatory to gain the trust of the local communities. Every small community wants to provide safe drinking water and quality wastewater to protect their citizens and the environment, but they need to know, often with hands-on demonstration, just how to operate their wastewater systems. This assistance operates free of charge to small communities which often saves the community many thousands of dollars from having to hire consultants or open themselves to civil penalties under the Clean Water Act – they only work in the interest of the small community they are assisting.

All communities (i.e. local governments) want to ensure quality wastewater and stay in compliance, and this type of technical assistance provides them the technical resources to do it. Some communities have just one person responsible for operating their wastewater systems and maintaining compliance with their federal permit - and maintaining the safety of their public drinking water supply.

Agriculture Letter:

Dear Chair Bishop and Ranking Member Aderholt:

We would like to thank the Members of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee for their continued support of vital water infrastructure and technical assistance funding for rural and small communities through programs under the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). As the subcommittee moves forward with the consideration of agriculture appropriations for fiscal year (FY) 2020, we write to respectfully request the following funding levels:

USDA Water and Sewer Loan and Grant program: \$1 billion

USDA Circuit Rider program: at least \$19.57 million

Farm Service Agency (FSA) Grassroots Source Water Protection program: at least \$6.5 million

Small and rural communities have an important public responsibility of complying with all applicable federal Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act regulations in order to supply the public with safe drinking water and sanitation. Most U.S. water utilities are small; over 91 percent of the country's 50,259 drinking water systems serve communities with fewer than 10,000 people and approximately 80 percent of the country's over 15,000 wastewater systems serve fewer than 10,000 people. Unfortunately, due to limited economies of scale and lack of technical expertise, small and rural communities often have difficulty complying with federal mandates. Collectively, the USDA Water and Sewer Loan and Grant program, the USDA Circuit Rider program and the FSA Grassroots Source Water Protection program are essential in helping small and rural communities overcome their limitations in providing safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation.

The USDA Water and Sewer Loan and Grant program helps to construct water and wastewater infrastructure through grants and loans provided at reasonable rates and terms. The current backlog for the USDA Water and Sewer Loan and Grant program is approximately \$3 billion. This backlog represents small and rural community water infrastructure projects that are unable to access alternative sources of funding. Without this assistance, many communities would not have the means to construct new water systems, expand existing systems, or comply with federal mandates. Thus, we respectfully urge the subcommittee to include \$1 billion in the FY 2020 appropriations for the USDA Water and Sewer Loan and Grant program to address the current USDA backlog.

The USDA Circuit Rider program is a hugely successful USDA local initiative that uses appropriated funds to provide the necessary technical expertise and training to rural communities. This program provides the primary support for communities to operate safe and clean drinking water systems and helps to ensure compliance with current water regulations. Circuit riders are in the field every day helping these communities with water system compliance, operations, maintenance, management, and training. This assistance protects the federal government's sizable investment in rural water infrastructure. We respectfully request the USDA Circuit Rider program to be funded at a minimum of \$19.57 million to continue maintaining the number of full-time employees necessary to fulfill the important mission of this program.

The FSA Grassroots Source Water Protection Program provides our rural communities with the technical assistance necessary to improve water quality and provide safe drinking water. The source water program provides each state with one full-time staff member to coordinate and assist our rural communities in the implementation of source water protection plans. Without adequate funding for the FSA Grassroots Source

Water Protection program, water quality in rural communities across the nation will be at risk. Thus, we respectfully request that the subcommittee continue funding this program at \$6.5 million.

State rural water associations have continually utilized the resources provided under these programs to serve millions of Americans across the nation, including the U.S. territories. Failure to fund these programs at the requested levels will cause irreparable and long-lasting harm to community water systems throughout the U.S. and the Americans who rely upon them. We appreciate your consideration and your immediate attention to these programs.

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Contact eDC Support

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[National Rural Water Association](#)

Contact: Mike Keegan, Policy Analyst <keegan@ruralwater.org>

The National Rural Water Association is the country's largest public drinking water and sanitation supply organization with over 30,000 members. Safe drinking water and sanitation are generally recognized as the most essential public health, public welfare, and civic necessities.

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