

Rural Water Policy Advisory [5/7/2018]

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The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Invites Dennis Sternberg with Arkansas Rural Water Association to Testify on Wednesday at 10:00 AM: The purpose of the hearing is to examine a Senate bill expected to be introduced on Tuesday titled, “*America’s Water Infrastructure Act of 2018.*”

- **Additional Technical Assistance:** We are optimistic that the legislation will include a number of important and beneficial water provisions including **Senator Wicker and Heitkamp’s S. 518, “The Small and Rural Community Clean Water Technical Assistance Act.”** The legislation would authorize two new technical assistance provisions under Clean Water Act that are similar to provisions currently authorized under the Safe Drinking Water Act. First, S. 518 would establish a federal Clean Water Act (CWA) technical assistance program, administered by the EPA, to assist small public wastewater treatment systems (those serving not more than 10,000 people) in complying with CWA regulations. The bill would authorize \$15 million a year over five years for technical assistance. Second, the bill would authorize states administering Clean Water State Revolving Funds (SRFs) to use up to two percent of their state grant to fund technical assistance initiatives to small wastewater treatment works in their respective states. A similar program currently is authorized and operating within the states’ Safe Drinking Water SRF.
- **Additional Emphasis on Water Workforce Development:** We are also expecting the bill to include a provision expressing that it is the sense of Congress that water and wastewater utilities provide a unique opportunity for access to stable, high-quality careers. And as water and wastewater utilities make critical investments in infrastructure, water and wastewater utilities can invest in the development of local workers and local small businesses to strengthen communities and ensure a strong pipeline of skilled and diverse workers for today and tomorrow. Rural Water welcomes this new federal attention and emphasized mission for water workforce development. In addition to increasing professional demands, utilities will soon be forced to replace many of their most experienced employees. Over the next decade, the water sector is expected to lose between 30 and 50 percent of the workforce to retirement. Many of these employees have worked at the same utility for the majority of their careers, and they will depart with decades of valuable institutional knowledge. NRWA and state rural water associations currently provide training on operator certification, financial sustainability, environmental compliance, utility management and governance to 80,000 water professionals annually in all 50 states. In July, 2017, NRWA announced the certification of our “National Guideline Standards of Apprenticeship” with the U.S. Department of Labor. This standard will ensure a well-trained and capable water sector workforce to meet the increasing demands of the water industry. Our apprenticeship program is tailored to water system operations specialists and wastewater system operations specialists. Additional apprenticeships programs are in the works for water utility system customer service personnel and technical assistance specialists.

[National Rural Water Association](#)

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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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