



## The New York Water Environment Association, Inc.

*The Water Quality Management Professionals*

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25 October 2021

Senator Charles E. Schumer  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Support of Permanent Inclusion – Low Income Water Assistance Program

Dear Senator Schumer:

I am writing on behalf of the New York Water Environment Association (NYWEA) and its over 2,000 members to thank you and the New York delegation for your recognition of water and wastewater rate payers' financial needs during the pandemic. The inclusion of a combined \$1.138 billion in emergency low-income water assistance funding in the Consolidated Appropriations of 2020 and the American Rescue Plan will go a long way in easing the financial burden on low-income households unable to pay their water bills. Due to the success of the program thus far and our estimate of long-term need, we ask that you support the inclusion of a permanent nationwide low-income water assistance program in the upcoming reconciliation package.

This emergency pandemic funding was an essential step in combatting the financial crisis people across New York and America are still facing brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the water affordability challenge was merely exacerbated, not created by COVID-19, and the need for low-income assistance has existed long before the pandemic's disastrous economic impacts.

Utilities in New York and across the U.S. are nearly exclusively funded by their rate payers, with overall federal investment in water systems below 5%. When ratepayers are unable to pay for their bills, it becomes increasingly difficult to make the proper investments, and utilities are forced to pass on the costs of unpaid bills to remaining customers through higher rates. Declining federal investment in water infrastructure in recent years combined with increasing costs for maintenance, personnel, operations, capital investments, and compliance have worsened this challenge, causing utilities to balance rising costs while aiming to keep rates affordable.

Long-term low-income assistance programs are currently being sought in the Chemung County Sewers Districts, and many other municipalities across NYS with hardship customers needing critical support with rate affordability for both water and sewer service.

Many utilities, including the New York City Department of Environmental Protection and Buffalo Sewer Authority have chosen to not pursue water shut offs in response to unpaid bills to ensure access to clean drinking water, hygienic wash facilities, and sanitary waste

disposal. This commitment to protecting public health puts expanded financial pressure on these utilities, which further impacts rate payers. Furthermore, these utilities are also at a disadvantage in the currently funded emergency low-income water assistance program because the program targets stopping water shut offs rather than broader low-income customer assistance.

A nationwide, permanent low-income water customer assistance program will help solve this problem in an equitable manner by targeting assistance towards the households who struggle the most to afford their water and wastewater bills. We urge you to support the creation of this program to ensure all Americans, regardless of financial stature, are able to access water services.

NYWEA and its member entities look forward to continuing to work with you towards protecting public health and the environment for all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lauren M. Livermore". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Lauren Livermore, P.E., BCEE  
NYWEA President