

Water Infrastructure Alliance

c/o The Engineering Center
One Walnut Street
Boston, MA 02108

October 7, 2020

Honorable Robert DeLeo, Speaker
Office of the Speaker of the House
State House, Room 356
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Honorable Karen Spilka, Senate President
Office of the Senate President
State House, Room 332
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Dear Senate President Spilka and Speaker DeLeo:

On behalf of the Water Infrastructure Alliance, we write relative to three areas of importance to the Commonwealth's water infrastructure system in light of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the Massachusetts legislature returns to consider the remaining fiscal year 2021 budget and other important policy matters, we urge you to recognize the impact COVID-19 has had on municipal and regional water systems throughout the Commonwealth and include financial support for our utilities, protect appropriations to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, and, generally, continue to invest in the Commonwealth's water infrastructure system.

In particular, the Water Infrastructure Alliance asks you to consider the following:

1. Necessary Public Health Measures Adversely Impacted Municipal and Regional Water Utilities. As identified by the 2012 Water Infrastructure Finance Commission, the Commonwealth's mechanisms for paying for water and sewer services are based on usage (i.e. volume). While improved water conservation strategies and technologies have already impacted these mechanisms, the public health measures necessary to contain the spread of COVID-19 further reduced the amount of water being used by commercial interests. Large volume users like pharmaceutical companies, manufacturing and, generally, office buildings were not using the amount of water they normally do. Likewise, restaurants, coffee shops and smaller commercial water and sewer users were not either. As a result, some municipal and regional water utilities – which rely on revenue from their water and sewer rates – saw significant declines in revenue. Further, we are seeing indications that ratepayers are having difficulty paying their bills. The City of Framingham has seen a 53% increase in past due balances based on March 2019 compared to Sept. 2020. The Springfield Water & Sewer Commission's unpaid receivables were \$9.1 million in August of 2020, compared with \$4.6 million in August of 2019 - a 99% increase. Again, municipal and regional water utilities, which balance tight budgets in a normal year, must continue to play a major role in ensuring our water systems are safe and clean in a year of reduced revenues. When crafting any COVID-19 relief legislation or when making potential funding decisions, please remember to include financial support for municipal and regional water utilities and their ratepayers.
2. Protect Funding for the Department of Environmental Protection. Before the onset of COVID-19, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), charged with protecting our Commonwealth's overall water infrastructure needs, began to address the presence of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in certain water supplies. PFAS, contained in a wide variety

of commercial and retail products, is an example of an emerging contaminant which poses daunting challenges for public water systems on every conceivable front, including, but not limited to, the introduction of new sampling protocols, a paucity of reliable analytical resources, water treatment uncertainties, and, most notably, unprecedented cost, funding, and risk communication obligations. The Massachusetts legislature, which provided initial funding for municipalities and regional water utilities to identify and address PFAS, will be undercutting these time sensitive efforts if the DEP's budget is reduced. Further, notwithstanding the work needed to address PFAS, the DEP plays a central and pivotal role in administering the Commonwealth's statewide revolving fund for drinking and clean water programs. Any reduction to the DEP's budget could impact the DEP's ability to help municipalities and regional water systems to meet our shared water infrastructure needs. The loss of funding for the DEP will impact the Commonwealth's public health, public safety, environment and economic development at a time when it is more important than ever.

3. Continue to Invest in the Commonwealth's Water Infrastructure System. Massachusetts has a significant funding gap in addressing its water infrastructure needs over the next twenty years. The 2012 report of the Massachusetts Water Infrastructure Finance Commission and a 2017 report from the Office of the Auditor found that the Commonwealth and its municipalities have a \$18 billion to \$21 billion funding gap in meeting their drinking and wastewater infrastructure needs. Recognizing the need to assist municipalities and regional water systems in addressing this problem, the Massachusetts legislature has given greater flexibility to the Massachusetts Clean Water Trust (CWT) in recent years to provide additional financial assistance for eligible projects that have met a series of reasonable best management practices (i.e. development of an asset management plan, etc.). Continuing to fund the contract assistance line-item (1595-1205) will allow the CWT to expand assistance to municipalities and regional water systems to meet our shared water infrastructure needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every facet of life. The Commonwealth's water infrastructure system is key to our ability to protect public health while enabling the foundation for economic growth. The Water Infrastructure Alliance, comprised of a diverse array of public water supply and clean water organizations, environmental groups, construction and engineering associations, and municipal and regional advocacy organizations, respectfully urges the Massachusetts legislature to support the aforementioned items.

We thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,



Abbie Goodman, Executive Director
American Council of Engineering Companies
of MA, Co-chair Water Infrastructure Alliance



Jennifer A. Pederson, Executive Director
Massachusetts Water Works Association, Co-
Chair, Water Infrastructure Alliance

Suzanne M. Bump, Auditor of the
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Karen Lachmayr, Chair, Wastewater
Advisory Committee to the MWRA

Cc:

Honorable Aaron Michlewitz, Chair
House Committee on Ways and Means

Honorable Michael Rodrigues, Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means