



June 23, 2020

The Honorable John Barrasso
Chairman
Senate Environment & Public Works
Committee
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Carper
Ranking Member
Senate Environment and Public Works
Committee
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Barrasso and Ranking Member Carper:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we urge you to support S. 2596, The Voluntary Partnerships For Distressed Communities Act of 2019, introduced by Senators Duckworth and Braun, and to include this bill in the Drinking Water Infrastructure Act of 2020 as it moves to full consideration in the Senate. We urge the committee to work with the bill leads on reaching compromise language that satisfies all parties. This narrow policy change has the potential to bring safer drinking water to millions of Americans.

As you know, many communities are facing increasing challenges to maintain their water systems due to aging infrastructure, increasing compliance costs, and changing demographics, and they lack economies of scale to address these challenges. Thousands of utilities are in and out of compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act, most of which rely on much needed technical assistance and training.

Failing to address water systems in serious noncompliance puts public health at risk. Many systems are often in rural and/or underserved communities, further exacerbating inequities. Rather than wait for traditional enforcement action—which drains financial resources from the utility, exacerbating the underlying cause—we believe that communities should be given a range of options to bring their system into compliance and provide safe, reliable and affordable drinking water to their community.

This bill, if enacted, would encourage systems in significant noncompliance to voluntarily partner with successful utilities, while limiting liability for the Good Samaritan water utility. Many successful utilities have expressed the desire to help their neighbors but are hesitant to do so because of the potential of transfer of liability. This voluntary decision to partner with a Good Samaritan would be made solely by the local community with the struggling water system—not the EPA, the state, or any other utility.

As stewards of America’s water infrastructure, we, and the thousands of systems we serve from across our nation, urge you to enact legislation to encourage the use of voluntary partnerships. We support this bill because all Americans deserve clean, safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water. We stand ready to work with you to ensure this provision is included in your final drinking water package this year.

Sincerely,

American Public Works Association

American Society of Civil Engineers

American Water Works Association

Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies

BPC Action

Moonshot Missions

National League of Cities

Rural Community Assistance Partnership

Xylem Inc.