



August 11, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader, United States Senate
U.S. Capitol Building, Room S-224
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader, United States Senate
U.S. Capitol Building, Room S-230
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker, United States House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader, United States House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP), we write to thank you for your continuing support for economic development and infrastructure investment in rural communities and urge you to prioritize support for rural and underserved communities in future infrastructure legislation, particularly the upcoming proposed budget reconciliation bill. As a national nonprofit network reaching rural, tribal, and small communities in all 50 states and territories, we know all too well the negative impacts aging infrastructure has on the public and economic health of rural America.

RCAP works with small communities and partners across the country to advocate for and generate economic opportunities and infrastructure investment for rural areas and to ensure that every community has the resources needed to thrive. RCAP serves more than 3.4 million rural and tribal residents each year through programs that touch the issues addressed by federal infrastructure investment. Of the approximately 150,000 public water systems, 97 percent serve fewer than 10,000 people, many served directly by federal programs.

Specifically, we urge you to consider increasing infrastructure funding for the following programs, all of which serve as crucially important support for rural communities and help leverage critical federal infrastructure dollars for rural communities:

- *Invest in Rural Water and Waste Disposal Infrastructure through USDA-Rural Development:* Include \$10 billion for water and sewer systems as outlined in the American Jobs Plan (AJP). Provide at least \$3 billion in loans and \$2 billion in grants to USDA's Water Environment Programs per year.
- *Fund a Rural Partnership Program through USDA-Rural Development:* Provide at least \$5 billion to help rural communities build on their unique assets with more inclusive economic development to reach more rural communities across federal programs.
- *Support Existing Water Systems in Financial Difficulty to Due COVID-19:* Provide grant assistance, debt forgiveness, and loan restructuring included in the American Jobs Plan.
- *Support Technical Assistance Funding to Leverage Infrastructure Dollars in Rural America:* Increase funding for Rural Water Technical Assistance Resources available to RCAP and other organizations at USDA, EPA, and HHS, specifically:
 - USDA: \$50 million for the overall Rural Utility Service Technical Assistance and Training Grant account, and specifically \$25 million for the set aside within this account reserved for multi-state regional technical assistance serving populations of 3300 or below.

- o EPA Technical Assistance and Training: \$40 million.
 - o EPA Publicly Owned Treatment Works Technical Assistance: \$18 million.
 - o HHS Rural Community Facilities Technical Assistance: \$10 million to support distressed communities and reach low-income households eligible for rate assistance.
- *Increase funding for the Economic Development Administration's National Technical Assistance Program:* In FY21 Appropriations, Congress funded a technical assistance program to allow qualified nonprofits to assist economically distressed small, rural, and underserved communities with pre-development activities associated with accessing EDA's infrastructure programs and services. Support \$20 million for this program, with a \$5 million set-aside for technical assistance to disadvantaged small, rural, and underserved communities.
 - *Address PFAS:* Create a \$20 million technical assistance program for qualified rural nonprofit, multi-regional, and national organizations to support efforts to combat PFAS contamination.
 - *Support low-income households:* In late December 2020, for the first time ever, Congress appropriated \$638 million in assistance for low-income water and wastewater customers. While we applaud Congress for this historic action, we urge you to increase funding for this program to \$8 billion at EPA, to be in line with the true need in our communities.

According to EPA, there is a 20 year need of \$464 billion for capital improvements to America's public water system infrastructure. This total amount includes the needs of the approximately 52,000 community water systems; 21,400 not-for-profit non-community water systems; the needs of American Indian and Alaska Native village water systems; and the costs associated with proposed and recent regulations. The services provided through these programs will deliver infrastructure upgrades in the small and disadvantaged communities where it is most needed, especially as our country continues to rebuild and replace old infrastructure.

We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to ensure this important funding is included in infrastructure legislation this year.

Thank you,



Nathan Ohle, Chief Executive Officer
Rural Community Assistance Partnership

Cc: Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Graham, Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Burr, Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chairman Yarmuth, Ranking Member Smith, Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers, Chairman Defazio, Ranking Member Graves, Chairman Scott, and Ranking Member Thompson