January 31, 2024

Representative Buddy Carter
Chair, House Subcommittee on Environment,
Manufacturing, and Critical Materials
2432 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC, 20515

Representative Paul Tonko
Ranking Member, House Subcommittee on
Environment, Manufacturing, and Critical Materials
2463 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Carter and Ranking Member Tonko,

On behalf of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) – a national network of non-profit partners working to provide technical assistance, training, and resources to rural and Tribal communities in every state and territory, and on Tribal lands and Colonias – I write to thank you for your continued support for rural water and for holding today's hearing on ensuring the cybersecurity of drinking water systems.

Water systems in small, rural, and underserved communities face unique challenges when it comes to building the capacity to carry out necessary capital infrastructure upgrades and to manage day-to-day operations and maintenance activities. Rural systems are often run by volunteers or one or two full-time staff members, and because of these systems' relatively small number of ratepayers, they struggle disproportionately to develop the economies of scale needed to have cash on hand for new or unexpected costs. Many times, our assistance and the availability of federal resources provide the only pathway to getting necessary work done to ensure the continued reliability of utility services for their community.

The emerging prevalence of water system cybersecurity concerns in the past few years – and particularly in recent months with the new wave of attacks from foreign actors with ties to Iran – now adds to the list of complex and costly factors utility managers must address to ensure the safety and reliability of their systems. This is particularly concerning for many of the small, rural systems we work with, as limited financial and staff resources make it far more difficult for them to develop the capacity needed to implement robust cyber protections.

To take on this immense challenge, small, rural systems need better educational resources regarding their vulnerability and the urgent need to address it, and, <u>critically</u>, need for there to be increased, flexible federal funding and technical assistance resources made available for this purpose. For the well over 100,000 small systems serving communities of 3,300 or less across the U.S., awareness of their susceptibility and best practices to address it alone are not enough to solve this issue, as many are juggling a handful of immediate responsibilities with already stretched-thin financial and staff resources.

Congress must address this by providing robust funding and technical assistance provisions to help small systems broadly take up durable cybersecurity protection practices and to assist communities with adding cybersecurity to their required Risk and Resilience Assessments under the Safe Drinking Water Act. RCAP and its network stand ready to help the federal government implement these resources in rural communities across the U.S.

The provision of safe and clean water is essential to the health and sustainability of all communities, and protection from cybersecurity concerns is an important part of this mission. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to ensure small, rural communities have the federal funding and technical assistance resources they need to address this emerging threat.

Thank you,

Olga Morales-Pate
CEO, Rural Community Assistance Partnership