

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair, Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair, Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education
Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member, Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education
Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20510

April 5, 2023

Dear Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Chair of the Subcommittee Baldwin, and Ranking Member of the Subcommittee Capito:

The undersigned organizations and municipalities urge Congress to allocate \$1 billion to continue the existing separate and independent Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) program to help families with growing water debt and rising water costs.

In 2021, Congress created funding streams that work in concert to support water affordability from both a household and utility perspective. To lower the cost of capital improvements, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provided an increase in low-interest and grant funding streams directed at disadvantaged communities through the State Revolving Funds program. To support household affordability, Congress created LIHWAP and provided \$1.14 billion for customer assistance. To date, over 400,000 households have benefitted from LIHWAP, and many more will benefit as states continue to roll out the program until the end of 2023. Households have been reconnected to water service, disconnections have been prevented, and water burdens have been reduced, all as a result of the LIHWAP program.

Across the United States, drinking water costs are rising. Over the last two decades, the rising cost of water has surpassed Consumer Price Index (CPI) growth meaning that household water burden has also increased.¹ Without the LIHWAP program, many low-income households are, and could become, at risk of losing their access to water through water shutoffs because they

¹ [Keeping Pace with Water and Wastewater Rates | Energy Technology Area \(lbl.gov\)](#); [Water and Wastewater Rate Hikes Outpace CPI \(Technical Report\) | OSTI.GOV](#); [Millions of Americans Can't Afford Water - Consumer Reports](#)

cannot afford to pay their water bills.² These families could even lose their homes through liens and foreclosures based on the bills they cannot afford to pay. The LIHWAP program is essential to keeping households connected to water.

Utilities also benefit from the LIHWAP program. Water infrastructure across the country is in dire need of upgrades.³ While capital improvements are necessary and often reduce costs for customers in the long-term (e.g. through reducing water loss), in the short-term these improvements require rate increases. As water rates increase and demand more and more of a household's income, low-income households are forced to decide between water or other essential services and goods. Households' inability to pay can mean a gap in revenue for utilities, and requires them to spend money trying to collect and punish unpaid bills. With ratepayers as the primary and often sole source of income for revenue, some utilities cannot shoulder the expenses of capital improvements. Furthermore, in response to decreased revenue streams, utility rate structures have also shifted to rely more heavily on fixed rate-structures, further disproportionately burdening the lowest-use and often lowest-income households.⁴

Without Congressional action, LIHWAP will expire at the end of FY23. The President's FY24 budget proposal wrongly proposes the combination of the LIHWAP and Low-Income Household Energy Affordability Program (LIHEAP) and provides a combined budget of \$4.1 billion, an increase of only \$111 million over the FY23 enacted funding level for LIHEAP alone. First, LIHWAP is currently and should remain a separate and independent program focused on guaranteeing water access and water affordability. Second, an \$111 million increase, less than \$2 million per state, is an insufficient allotment of funding to address the water needs of households. It amounts to only a tenth of the amount that was originally allocated to the program. \$1 billion should be invested in our low-income households and our utilities for FY 24 and FY 25.

We urge Congress to 1) maintain separation between LIHWAP and LIHEAP and 2) provide an allocation of \$1 billion to LIHWAP to be spent in FY24 and FY25. Access to water is a public health issue and we ask that you maintain support for this new but critical program.

Sincerely,

National and Multi-Regional Organizations

American Rivers

Center for Water Security and Cooperation

DigDeep

Elevate

² Center for Water Security and Cooperation, [The Accessibility Trap: Maryland's Invisible Water Crisis](#). And Center for Water Security and Cooperation, [American Water Access Survey](#).

³ [American Society of Civil Engineers. Infrastructure Report Card](#).

⁴ [U.S. water & wastewater bills climb, exposing questions of affordability - Bluefield Research](#)

GreenLatinos

League of Women Voters of the United States

Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network

National Consumer Law Center, on behalf of its low-income clients

National Energy Assistance Directors Association

Natural Resources Defense Council

ReImagine Appalachia

River Network

Sierra Club

The Alliance for Appalachia

Water for People

HHS Region 2

New Jersey Future

HHS Region 3

412 Justice

Borough of Forest Hills, PA

Chesapeake Legal Alliance

Community Action Association of Pennsylvania

Harrisburg Center for Peace & Justice

Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Interfaith Power & Light

Pennsylvania Senate District 1

Pennsylvania Utility Law Project

Philadelphia Welfare Rights Organization

Pittsburgh United

UpstreamPgh

Waterkeepers Chesapeake

Waterspirit

Welfare Pride Inc.

Westmoreland County Food Bank, Inc.

WV Citizen Action Group

HHS Region 4

Alabama Rivers Alliance

Appalachian Citizens' Law Center

Cahaba River Society

Friends for Environmental Justice

Kentucky Conservation Committee

Kentucky Resources Council
Martin County Concerned Citizens
The Mountain Citizen

HHS Region 5

Accompanying Returning Citizens with Hope (ARCH), Central Ohio Citizen Circle
Alliance for the Great Lakes
Citizens Action Coalition of IN
FreshWater Accountability Project
Ohio Environmental Council
Prairie Rivers Network
Village of Amesville
Village of Corning

HHS Region 6

Committee for a Better New Orleans
Louisiana Progress
Taproot Earth
The Water Collaborative of Greater New Orleans

HHS Region 7

Missouri Confluence Waterkeeper

HHS Region 8

Energy Outreach Colorado

HHS Region 9

Social Eco Education

HHS Region 10

Puget Soundkeeper