

Low-Income Water Consumer Assistance Program Act Sign On Letter

Please sign onto the letter below regarding the Low-income Consumer Assistance Program Act . The deadline to sign on is December 8th, 2017

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Dear Senator Cardin:

The undersigned organizations support the draft Low-Income Water Consumer Assistance Programs Act of 2017 (the Act), which would create a pilot program of grants to municipalities and local or regional utilities to help low-income households afford their water, wastewater, and stormwater bills.

This country must not have a two-tiered system where the wealthy get water that is clean and safe for their families, and the less well-to-do get second-class water, wastewater, and stormwater systems that pose risks to their health and environment. Rather, we need to create a system that ensures that all communities can afford to upgrade their water infrastructure and that everyone has affordable access to clean, safe, and sufficient water and sanitation for their families. The Act will help our nation achieve these goals.

The United States needs a combination of increased federal, state, and local funding to cover the tremendous costs of repairing, replacing, and upgrading our aging and inadequate water infrastructure. Because utility rate revenue serves as the principal source of dedicated, local funding for water infrastructure, most communities find that making the necessary investments in water infrastructure means increasing water and sewer rates. Along with those increases, communities need new and better programs to ensure that essential levels of water and sewer service remain affordable for those least able to pay.

In the electric and gas utility sector, programs to provide assistance to low-income customers are well-established, including the federally-funded Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The water sector, however, lacks a comparable federal program, and local programs are currently the exception, rather than the rule. Further, most existing local programs are inadequate to meet demand.

The Act would begin to address this gap by creating a pilot program of grants to at least 20 drinking water systems and 10 wastewater or stormwater systems, including set-asides for a specific number of small, medium, and large systems (based on population served). The bill includes provisions to help ensure that participating utilities will design and implement their programs using established best practices for low-income customer assistance, including options such as bill discounts or other direct financial assistance, lifeline rates, percentage-of-income payment plans, and water efficiency assistance. It also includes provisions to ensure that the pilot grants support local efforts to equitably fund compliance with Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act standards, and to encourage a state or local match to the federal grant. Additionally, the bill requires a pair of reports to Congress – one on the lessons learned from implementing the pilot, and one providing an assessment of the need for a nationwide, rural and urban low-income community water assistance program.

The Act is a vital complement to bipartisan efforts to increase federal investment in water and sewer infrastructure. Our organizations thank you for your leadership in drafting it and strongly support it.