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Wm. Patrick Madden
Mayor, City of Troy

Office of the Mayor
City Hall
433 River Street
Troy, New York 12180

Phone: (518) 279-7130
Fax: (518) 270-4546
mayorsoffice@troyny.gov

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Testimony: Joint Legislative Budget Committee on Local Governments

Distinguished members of the New York State Senate and Assembly Joint Budget Committee on Local Governments: thank you for allowing me to speak this afternoon regarding the critical need for increased funding to support municipalities across New York State, specifically investment in our aging municipal water infrastructure in our local communities.

There are a number of potentially beneficial proposals included in Governor Andrew Cuomo's executive budget favorable to upstate cities like Troy. However, I come before you today to speak in support of the proposed \$250 million initiative to support drinking water and wastewater infrastructure projects across the state.

Out of sight, out of mind. That is the phrase I use to describe public awareness surrounding the issue of water infrastructure: an essential yet seemingly invisible component of not only economic prosperity but improved quality of life across our communities in upstate New York.

As a brief background: Troy, also known as the Collar City, is a small community of 50,000 people located on the eastern bank of the Hudson River in Rensselaer County, only a few short miles north of Albany. During the last five years, the City of Troy has experienced an incredible rebirth. Over one hundred new business and development projects have chosen Troy as their home. The New York Times recently called our city "the new Brooklyn." This renaissance has renewed the promise of a bright future for the residents and businesses of the Collar City.

Troy is also the principal supplier of treated water to nine nearby communities, representing approximately 135,000 customers across three counties in the Capital Region.

Each day, roughly 21 million gallons of potable water is processed by the Troy Water Plant and distributed to our customers in surrounding municipalities. These towns and cities choose to receive their water from the city of Troy because of its high quality, our systems' reliability, and rapid availability; it is also one of the largest sources of revenue for our city each year.

Just over one week ago, in the early morning of Sunday, January 17th, my phone rang. It was our Superintendent of Public Utilities calling to inform me of a water main break in the Lansingburgh neighborhood in the City of Troy. Our city had experienced water main breaks in the past. All were quickly identified, isolated and repaired. However, this was not your average break.

Upon arriving on scene, I was shocked at the magnitude of what I saw. Water sprayed six feet into the air from a massive crater which had torn open the street. Pieces of shale and shattered concrete were pushed by rapidly moving streams pouring down Fifth Avenue.

The break was a result of a catastrophic failure of a 110-year old, 33 inch water main, pouring over eight million gallons of water into our streets. The steel main itself experienced a tear that was nearly three feet across. Roads

were closed, neighborhoods were flooded. A state of emergency was declared. City, county and state emergency management services were called to the scene to assess the damage and lend assistance.

Thanks to the quick response of our Public Utilities crews, we were able to isolate the ruptured main, stop the flow of water, and restore service back to our city.

The ramifications of this incident were quite significant. All communities served by our system were asked to voluntarily restrict water usage. Two communities, the Towns of Halfmoon and Waterford, because of their location on our system, were more severely impacted. In an effort to keep a flow of water to their residents, schools were closed for two days and businesses were affected. We were fortunate that that no hospitals or senior living facilities needed to be vacated.

The water main break was more than a mere inconvenience. It impacted commerce and could have had serious health and safety concerns. While final costs have yet to be calculated, there is no doubt that the cost of this event will negatively impact our city's services, operations, and future infrastructure improvements

Further, Troy's recent growth and economic gains could be at risk. Reliability of infrastructure is a key determinant of a business's decision to locate or grow. A failure to invest further into our aging water infrastructure system poses a risk not only to our quality of life, but also to our economic prosperity. Without reliable sources of water, we may see a reduction in our upstate cities' ability to retain key partners who bring investment and jobs to legacy cities like Troy.

Approximately 145 miles of water lines run beneath the streets of Troy, with ages ranging from 1860 through present day. A recent estimate put replacement costs for these lines at approximately \$1 million per half mile. The estimated cost to replace just the recently damaged water main is close to \$2.7 million alone.

How do we prepare for future breaks? We must remain vigilant. Our Public Utilities department constantly monitors our system and addresses problems as they are discovered. But we also must invest in our city's future.

It is important to stress that Troy is not alone in facing issues of aging water infrastructure. Cities across New York State are addressing the same concerns over the water lines that supply drinking water and sewer services to their residents. This requires a comprehensive approach from our local municipalities and state leaders to take steps to ensure the future prosperity of small cities like Troy.

My administration has remained in constant contact with Governor Cuomo's office, and through additional assistance of our local elected representatives here in Albany, we have continued to pursue financial assistance for these essential projects to overhaul our water infrastructure.

This problem will not abate on its own. Our upstate cities need this critical investment in the invisible network that exists beneath our feet.

Therefore, I respectfully request the Senate and Assembly fully fund Governor Cuomo's proposal for \$250 million in increased water infrastructure funding in the 2016-17 budget. The stakes have never been higher for upstate communities like Troy.

Thank you for your time.