



Testimony for the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Local Government Regarding Municipal Clean Water Infrastructure Needs

February 25, 2015

Safe drinking water and clean waterways should not be taken for granted. With more than \$36 billion in unmet wastewater infrastructure needs for municipal collection, conveyance and treatment statewide, the Governor's proposed SFY2015-16 Budget should include a robust investment in the clean water that every community relies upon for public health and business. While the Governor's budget does propose the \$1.5 billion Upstate Revitalization Fund competition, clean water should not have to compete with other interests, as it benefits every New Yorker.

The undersigned strongly urge state legislators to stand up for our communities by creating a dedicated fund with at least \$800 million in new wastewater and drinking water infrastructure capital in the enacted budget.

Wastewater Infrastructure Funding Critical for Local Governments

Communities statewide are struggling as upgrades to an aging system are often cost prohibitive. The City of Syracuse suffered 391 water main breaks in 2014, and at least 45 already this year; Syracuse estimates system upgrades will exceed \$720 million. In the Capital region, the town of Colonie has had 90 water main breaks this winter alone. Additionally, communities all along the Hudson River have been impacted – including New York City – as wastewater infrastructure failures combined with rain and snowmelt have resulted in billions of gallons of untreated raw sewage being dumped into the river and tributaries annually. In one notorious 2012 incident, Tarrytown officials were forced to dump 3.4 million gallons of raw sewage into the Hudson following a sewer line break. Weeks prior, 200 million gallons were released from Manhattan's North River Wastewater Treatment Plant following an electrical fire.

The Legislature's Sewage Pollution Right to Know Act of 2012 was a critically important acknowledgement of the rampant public health concerns that come from untreated sewage entering water systems for drinking and recreation; the law, however, does not address the root issue, which can only be remedied with new wastewater infrastructure investments.

Urban, suburban, and rural municipalities are all faced with expensive water infrastructure needs, but rural communities are the least equipped to deal with these issues. Their sparse populations make it difficult to raise sufficient tax revenue for these projects and they cannot afford low- or no-interest loans offered by the State. This is particularly troublesome for municipalities that are currently under consent orders from the Department of Environmental Conservation or the Department of Health, which require them to mitigate environmental and population harm caused by aging water infrastructure. These communities want to comply, but lack the financial resources to do so. Moreover, many of these same communities require an investment in water



infrastructure in order to attract businesses and to grow their local economies. Roads and bridges are critical for customers to have access to businesses, but clean and potable water is equally important and complementary. Without it, such businesses cannot operate and serve as economic drivers in their communities.

A Gathering Storm

While the state Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) 2008 report, *A Gathering Storm*, noted \$36 billion in unmet wastewater infrastructure needs, that figure appears to have since grown. In this year's environmental budget hearing, DEC Commissioner Joe Martens acknowledged that figure may now be upwards of \$38 billion. Simply put, we are losing ground.

Nonetheless, spending on wastewater infrastructure has decreased. *Growing Cracks in the Foundation*, a September 2014 report from the state Comptroller notes that local government combined water and sewer capital spending decreased more than \$68 million between 2010 and 2012, while sewer spending was \$22 million less.

The lack of investment in the state's wastewater infrastructure is a significant burden on local governments and a hindrance to economic development – particularly Upstate. Inaction undermines our protection of public health and the environment. New Yorkers deserve to know their drinking water is clean, and their waterways are safe for swimming, fishing and more.

We applaud the legislature for raising this issue throughout this budget process and urge the Senate and Assembly to create a dedicated wastewater infrastructure fund in the amount of \$800 million in the SFY2015-16 Budget.

