

For Immediate Release: December 8, 2015

Local Officials, Advocates Urge \$800 Million to #FixOurPipes

Broad coalition asks for state budget investment into community water infrastructure to support health, economic development

Albany – With more than \$2 billion in additional bank settlement funds available this year, a diverse group of organizations, including local officials, health and environmental advocates and more are urging Governor Andrew Cuomo and state legislators [to invest \\$800 million into community water infrastructure](#) as part of the SFY2016-17 budget.

A Growing Gap

Last year, Governor Cuomo and state legislators created that budget line and earmarked an initial [\\$200 million for wastewater and clean water projects](#) over three years on the newly established Water Infrastructure Improvement Act budget line. The Departments of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and Health (DOH) have identified the need to invest over \$36 billion in wastewater and \$38 billion in drinking water infrastructure over 20 years. DEC has also stated that at least \$1 billion must be invested by all levels of government annually to meet local sewer infrastructure needs alone.

One of New York’s greatest assets is water. Safe, healthy, and functioning water infrastructure is crucial to the state’s efforts to attract new economic development, particularly upstate. Wastewater treatment plants are in need of continual maintenance and upkeep, which comes with a cost.

Liz Moran, water and natural resources associate at [Environmental Advocates of New York](#) said, “These funds are critical to protect public health and to allow New York to realize its full economic potential. Fixing New York’s crumbling water infrastructure will attract businesses and create desperately needed jobs for communities across the state. A solid water infrastructure is needed to foster the kind of sustainable economic development that creates and supports growth – communities with solid foundations attract and retain businesses. We need Governor Cuomo and state legislators to take the next step and #FixOurPipes.”

Peter A. Baynes, executive director of New York Conference of Mayors said, “Infrastructure is essential to both a community’s economic growth and improved quality of life. Building and maintaining municipal assets and facilities creates jobs and places the community in a better position to grow and respond to the needs of its residents and businesses. This, in turn, makes it a more attractive place to live and work. At a time when local governments are facing some of their greatest fiscal challenges with municipal budgets stretched thin and a less than 1% tax cap, it is essential that the state dedicate significant funding to local water and wastewater infrastructure.”

Tracy Brown, director of Western Sound Programs for Save the Sound said, “Decades of insufficient investment in water infrastructure have left communities across New York facing costly repairs and unacceptable water pollution. Our communities need financial support from

the state to bring these critical public health systems into 21st Century working condition. We can't afford to cut corners on clean water.”

Albert A. Annunziata of the Builders Institute of Westchester said, “As a matter of practical, common-sense economic policy, there's no such thing as a 'free lunch.' Our infrastructure for clean water, clear air, reliable roads, and sewage plants that work efficiently and don't foul our waterways and beaches all come at a price. Our leaders must realize that what costs pennies on the dollar now to fix our infrastructure will cost 10 or 100 times as much if we continue to ignore our infrastructure problems and allow precious time to slip away. The time is now to ensure a sustainable future for New York.”

Michael J. Garland, President of the New York Water Environment Association said, “New York State is blessed with abundant and affordable clean water. Reliable and resilient water infrastructure is essential to protect public health and the environment but also to drive economic development. It's fair to say, environmental responsibility and economic development go hand-in-hand.”

Ross Pepe, President of the Construction Industry Council of Westchester and Hudson Valley said, “Unseen doesn't mean unneeded. Drinking and wastewater underground and treatment infrastructure across New York State is vital to the economic, health and safety needs of all state residents and taxpayers. We urge Governor Cuomo and the state Legislature to fund clean water municipal programs now.”

William Cooke, director of government relations for Citizen's Campaign for the Environment said, “New York's economic future is our water – water will be more important than gold in the new economy. Our leaders must recognize that strong and resilient infrastructure is as important to water as a vault is to gold. We must invest in infrastructure.”

William C. Janeway, executive director of the Adirondack Council said, “Our clean lakes and rivers are what bring people to visit and live in the Adirondack Park, but they are in jeopardy from inadequate sewage treatment. The state has an opportunity to spur climate resiliency and hamlet-focused economic development efforts by increasing clean water grant funding, which closes the gap between the costs of water infrastructure projects and the amount a small, rural community can afford.”

Dan Shapley, water quality program manager for Riverkeeper said, “Our rivers and creeks too often are unsafe for swimming, according to data gathered by Riverkeeper and dozens of community scientists. Kids are going to play in the water whether it's clean or not. We need to invest in water infrastructure to make our waters safe.”

Marcia Bystryn, President of the New York League of Conservation Voters said, “New York is in dire need of \$800 million next year to support our crumbling wastewater infrastructure, yet municipalities are only slated to see a small fraction of that amount. How can these cities and towns prosper when they're dealing with literally hundreds of wastewater main breaks a year, threatening shorelines and our water supplies? They can't and they simply don't have the funds to solve the problem on their own. The state must step in.”

Community Impacts

Water main breaks and sewer overflows have been highlighted in the news across the state. Large water main breaks have temporarily closed businesses. Inadequate capacity in a sewer system can result in a business looking elsewhere to expand their operations. The reliability and resiliency of these systems is integral for economic growth and quality of life for New York State residents.

After decades of insufficient funding and investment, the costs of repairing and updating what are often a decades – if not century – old systems is too much for most communities in New York State. For example, the town of Henderson in Jefferson County decided to postpone its plans for a new wastewater treatment facility stating that the project was “simply not economically feasible at this point in time.” The requested financing for the Henderson project was listed by the New York Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC) as \$8.7 million. Henderson is by no means alone – this is just one example from the over six hundred wastewater treatment facilities that serve 1,610 municipalities and provide wastewater treatment to more than 15 million people across New York State. Similar cases can be found for needed upgrades throughout the 9,500 public water systems in New York.

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December 8, 2015

Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
Executive Chamber
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Re: Grant Funding for Water Infrastructure in the 2016-17 Enacted Budget

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to urge that you include at least \$800 million for water infrastructure projects in your SFY2016-17 budget proposal. Clean water infrastructure is critical to protecting public health and the environment, and a lynchpin for successful economic development statewide.

We thank you and the Legislature for working together to create the 2015 Water Infrastructure Improvement Act in the SFY2015-16 budget, allocating \$200 million in community grants over three years. This funding is providing an important boost to your economic development and climate resiliency efforts, while aiding communities who lack the resources to make these investments independently.

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has identified over \$36 billion in necessary wastewater infrastructure investments statewide. Additionally, the Department of Health (DOH) has identified over \$38 billion in drinking water infrastructure needs statewide over the next 20 years. DEC has also stated that at least \$1 billion must be invested by all levels of government annually to meet local sewer infrastructure needs alone. Communities across the state are doing their part to invest in their own drinking water and wastewater systems, but in many cases communities need help from the State to close the gap.

A well-maintained water infrastructure system is essential for protecting public health and the environment, and to bolster local economies. In many places all across New York, economic growth is hampered by a reliance on outdated wastewater technology and systems, which are severely degrading water resources and are not suitable for additional development. Our communities cannot thrive in the 21st century on 20th century water infrastructure. Municipal and business leaders recognize the difficulties that exist in attracting new development to our communities when local infrastructure is not reliable; people and businesses rightfully expect access to safe drinking water and clean waterways.

The Need is Great

Water infrastructure needs far exceed the amount of funding that has been made available. According to the Environmental Facility Corporation's (EFC's) 2016 Intended Use Plan for Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund, \$6 billion was listed for wastewater infrastructure projects, but only \$738 million is available in loan funds. Municipalities across the state are fortunate to have the EFC's programs to offer savings on their long-term interest payments; however, even with low cost financing many communities are struggling to implement improvements because of the debt they would incur.

Nearly every New York community is facing high infrastructure costs and, oftentimes, is spending scarce resources to repair their existing assets. These communities face considerable investments to upgrade old systems so that they may get into a position where they can shift more focus towards maintenance and operations. Moving from paying for repairs to paying for proper operations and maintenance is a necessary step if municipalities are going to get a handle on this growing problem, control costs and provide better value to their ratepayers and the environment. Many municipalities have – or are attempting to – implement “asset management approaches” for their infrastructure, but capital investments are needed to leverage these efforts.

Water main breaks and sewer overflows have been highlighted in the news across the state. Large water main breaks have temporarily closed businesses. Inadequate capacity in a sewer system can result in a business looking elsewhere to expand their operations. The reliability and resiliency of these systems is integral for economic growth and quality of life for New York State residents.

Furthermore, some communities in New York need to make a shift from outdated onsite systems such as traditional septic systems or cesspools to more advanced solutions for dealing with their wastewater. These may include sewerage in appropriate areas, community scale shared treatment systems, or advanced onsite systems that remove pollutants including nutrients from wastewater. Making these changes will protect water quality.

The costs on a community to single-handedly bear the financial burden of updating what is often a decades – if not century – old system is not viable. For example, the town of Henderson in Jefferson County decided to postpone its plans to build a wastewater treatment facility stating that the project was “simply not economically feasible at this point in time.” The requested financing for the Henderson project was listed by EFC as \$8.7 million. Henderson is by no means alone – this is just one example from the over six hundred wastewater treatment facilities that serve 1,610 municipalities and provide wastewater treatment to more than 15 million people

across New York State. Similar cases can be found for new systems and needed upgrades throughout the 9,500 public water systems in New York.

The benefits of investing in drinking water and wastewater infrastructure are clear. One of New York's greatest assets is water. As our climate changes and drought stricken regions seek out new opportunities, our water will be a top asset. Newer and bigger businesses will go where there is adequate water infrastructure capacity, and water infrastructure projects create jobs in and of themselves.

New York is once again looking at budget surplus, a favorable economic forecast, and has already received more than \$2 billion in additional settlement funds. Due to these positive financial developments, this is the time for increased investments in New York's water infrastructure. The future prosperity of New York's communities depends on your continued leadership. Thank you for considering our request for \$800 million for New York's clean water future.

Sincerely,

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