



March 24, 2023

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health & Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health & Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As you consider Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations legislation, we urge you to provide \$300 million in funding for the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) operated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). LIHWAP, as the first federal program to exclusively assist low-income families with their water and wastewater bills, has aided over 430,000 households since it was created by Congress at the end of 2021. LIHWAP funding is set to expire once all funds are exhausted if Congress does not act (some states have already exhausted all funding), ending a critical assistance lifeline to families in need.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a renewed focus on the essential role water service plays in protecting public health. At the same time, the economic fallout from the pandemic left more households struggling to pay their utility bills. Congress responded accordingly by creating LIHWAP in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, modeling it after the longstanding Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and initially funding the program at \$638 million. An additional \$500 million was provided to LIHWAP in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, bringing its total appropriation to \$1.138 billion. LIHWAP funding can be used to assist with: (1) paying arrears; (2) reconnecting services and covering late fees; and (3) reducing rate charges to a more affordable level.

However, because LIHWAP funding was provided under COVID relief bills, it does not have a dedicated funding stream. Once the funds are spent LIHWAP will no longer be able to help those in need. In fact, in multiple states, LIHWAP resources have already been exhausted, causing those states to close their programs once funds were expended last fall. While COVID-19 was the impetus for a federal water and wastewater assistance program for low-income

individuals and households, the need was there before the pandemic and continues post-pandemic.

Furthermore, as no funding stream for LIHWAP exists, previous funding requests have proposed permitting LIHEAP funds to be distributed to LIHWAP. Families should not be asked to choose between clean, safe water and access to energy in their homes. Additionally, this approach saddles program managers at Health and Human Services with the difficult task of determining how much funding should be set aside from already limited funding.

Both LIHEAP and LIHWAP are critical for the health and safety of each member of the household. For this reason, we respectfully request separate appropriations for water and energy assistance in order to maximize the aid to families in economic distress.

We all know why having safe, reliable drinking water and wastewater services is important, and the pandemic reiterated the public health imperative. As Congress works towards authorizing a permanent water assistance program to safeguard water affordability, we believe LIHWAP has proven itself to be a successful program in providing assistance to those who need it the most. As such, we request you provide \$300 million for LIHWAP in your FY24 legislation so that we may continue to provide critical water assistance to our most vulnerable children and families and ensure that those who need the help in paying their water bills are able to do so.

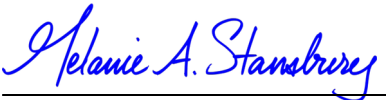
Sincerely,



Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress




Shri Thanedar
Member of Congress



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



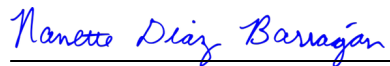
Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



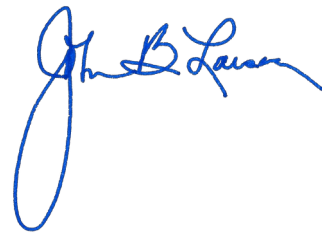
Greg Casar
Member of Congress



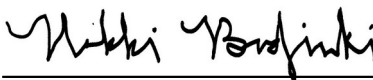
Marie Gluesenkamp Perez
Member of Congress



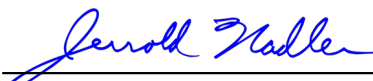
Nanette Diaz Barragan
Member of Congress



J. Luis Correa
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Nikki Budzinski
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Jerrold Nadler
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