

January 14, 2020

The Honorable John Barrasso  
Chairman, Committee on Environment  
and Public Works  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Carper  
Ranking Member, Committee on Environment  
and Public Works  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Barrasso and Ranking Member Carper:

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) urges the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works to strengthen the nation's drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure data and data collecting mechanisms. Every four years, ASCE publishes the *Infrastructure Report Card*, which grades the nation's 16 major infrastructure categories using a simple A to F school report card format. The Report Card examines the current infrastructure needs and conditions by assigning grades and making recommendations to raise them. ASCE's *2017 Infrastructure Report Card* rated the overall condition of the nation's infrastructure a cumulative grade of "D+" across sixteen categories, with an investment gap of \$2 trillion. The Report Card gave our nation's drinking water and wastewater infrastructure categories grades of "D" and "D+," respectively. Despite increased efficiency methods and sustainable practices, there is a growing gap between the capital needed to maintain drinking water and wastewater infrastructure and the actual investments made. As this gap continues to grow, it is critical that Congress has the data it needs to understand what is required to maintain and improve these infrastructure systems.

Congress requires the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to conduct the Drinking Water Needs Survey and the Clean Watersheds Needs Survey every four years to assess the nation's drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure needs. The EPA's most recent Drinking Water Needs Survey (DWNS) was completed in 2015, while the most recent Clean Watersheds Needs Survey (CWNS) was completed eight years ago in 2012.

The Drinking Water and Clean Watersheds Needs Surveys play a vital role in identifying much-needed investments in state and local drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure. For example, the 2015 Drinking Water Needs Survey determines the relative needs of each state and was used as the basis for the allotment of the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund for FY2018 – FY2021. These surveys not only serve as the basis for State Revolving Loan Fund allocations, but they are the only comprehensive datasets available on the state of our nation's many drinking water and wastewater systems.

Consistent lack of funding for these Needs Surveys has played a role in their delay. The 2015 Drinking Water Needs Survey had a response rate of 99.7 percent and an estimated drinking water investment need of \$472.6 billion over the next 20 years – a 10 percent increase compared to the 2011 Needs Survey. The 2012 Clean Watersheds Needs Survey, meanwhile, has an estimated wastewater investment need of \$271 billion – a 20 percent decrease compared to the 2008 Needs Survey. This decrease is due to several factors, including a decline in state participation in the survey compared to 2008 and other issues that are discussed below.

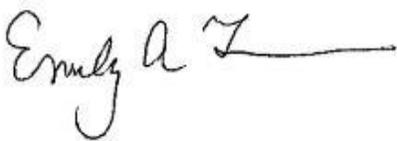
First, ASCE recommends that Congress fully fund both Needs Surveys during the annual appropriations process under the Interior & Environment appropriations bill. Second, ASCE has several recommendations for how to strengthen the data collected through these Needs Surveys. To start, the CWNS underestimates need because it only includes stormwater projects that address water quality. Non-point source pollution control projects were also not accepted for the 2012 CWNS. As stated on page 19 of the *2012 CWNS Report to Congress*, “EPA placed an increased emphasis on ensuring that reported stormwater needs have a stated water quality benefit. As a result, projects characterized as ‘flood control,’ without a stated water quality benefit were not accepted for 2012 CWNS. States indicated that this change made it more difficult to meet EPA’s documentation criteria for stormwater in 2012 than in 2008.” ASCE recommends that the CWNS allow non-point source pollution control and flood control stormwater projects be eligible for inclusion in future surveys.

Second, the EPA has a significant documentation requirement, which results in many projects being un- or under-reported. As noted on page 2 of the *2012 CWNS Report to Congress*, states reported a number of reasons why documented needs have declined, including that many projects are left out because there is no local budget for them; the difficulty that some states have – particularly those that encompass small communities – in obtaining acceptable documentation; and the decision by some states to limit their level of effort on the survey, particularly for reporting stormwater and combined sewer overflow (CSO) needs. Furthermore, page 2 explains that, “Forty percent of CWNS 2012 needs are documented using capital improvement plans (CIPs). CIPs include only projects that can be accomplished within the municipalities’ budgets and within a specified number of years (typically 3–5 years).” While these CIPs are readily accessible forms of documentation supported by EPA, they may not always reflect the utilities’ true needs, but rather the affordable path forward. As such, ASCE recommends that EPA work with the states to reduce the CWNS’ required documentation to mirror the DWNS’ documentation, which requires “a water system’s inventory of existing infrastructure assets, along with a simple statement of need, [is] considered as survey-generated documentation sufficient to justify certain replacement and rehabilitation needs.”

Finally, page 2 of *2012 CWNS Report to Congress* notes that, “While this Report might capture needs over a period of up to 20 years, nearly all needs it includes are for projects that will be completed within 5 years (i.e., 2012–2017). States do not generally have documentation for needs over a 20-year time frame.” ASCE recommends that the CWNS timeframe be changed to 5 or 10 years to more accurately reflect the nation’s true wastewater investment needs.

In conclusion, we urge you to fully fund the Needs Surveys and ask that you make changes to ensure they are fully capturing our nation’s water infrastructure needs. Thank you for consideration of our requests, and we look forward to working with you to strengthen the data of our nation’s drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure systems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emily A. Feenstra". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Emily Feenstra  
Managing Director, Government Relations and Infrastructure Initiatives