



City of Grand Rapids, Michigan

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

ROSALYNN C. BLISS
MAYOR

June 14, 2016

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Stabenow:

I am writing in support of the efforts by the Senate and House of Representatives to reauthorize water infrastructure projects this year by enacting a Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2016. The two bills, S. 2848 and H.R. 5303, that have been developed by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, respectively, do have significant differences. Therefore, I would like to offer the following recommendations as the bills continue their paths through the legislative process.

Our nation's drinking water infrastructure has been under increased focus recently. Accordingly, the City of Grand Rapids strongly urges Congress to include Title VII of S. 2848, which addresses safe drinking water and clean drinking water infrastructure, into the final version of the WRDA bill. Title VII includes significant investments in water and wastewater infrastructure and provisions that will help struggling communities meet their obligations under the Clean Water Act (CWA). The CWA is desperately in need of updating, and language in S. 2848 includes numerous reforms that make the law easier to comply with and more relevant given today's technologies.

In April, the City's Environmental Manager met with your staff on behalf of the City of Grand Rapids and other municipalities to discuss the need for Congress to improve upon the CWA and act to address the deterioration of our water and wastewater infrastructure. Enacting Title VII of S. 2848 would contribute to achieving these goals.

Specifically, the City of Grand Rapids supports provisions of S. 2848 that:

- Require the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to revise the 1997 *Combined Sewer Overflows — Guidance for Financial Capability Assessment and Schedule Development* to prohibit the agency from using a Median Household Indicator as the sole gauge of affordability for residential households
- Allow the EPA to conduct a study on the potential of establishing a subsidy program for low-income ratepayers struggling to afford water and wastewater bills and help incentivize full-cost pricing of water and clean water services

- Express that Congress should provide robust funding for the Clean Water (CW) and Drinking Water (DW) State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs without additional cuts
- Provide \$300 million to the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
- Codify EPA's 2012 Integrated Planning Framework to provide communities that develop integrated plans more flexible compliance schedules
- Make permanent the Water Infrastructure Finance and Investment Act (WIFIA)
- Provide \$1.4 billion in the form of EPA grants to aid small and disadvantaged communities in making drinking water improvements
- Establish an Office of Municipal Ombudsman within the Office of the EPA Administrator to work with municipalities as they implement compliance obligations overseen by EPA
- Address concerns over lead service lines and provide funding for the replacement of public and private lines
- Provide \$220 million in loans, loan forgiveness and grants for financial assistance to localities impacted by presidentially declared emergencies due to lead or other contaminants in drinking water
- Provide \$50 million per fiscal year to aid in the development and use of advanced technologies by water systems to address pressing water challenges, reduce ratepayer costs and improve the quality of water or system security
- Support voluntary school and child care drinking water testing

In addition, the City supports language urging the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to complete the Economic Evaluation Report (ERR) for the new Soo Lock project more quickly and to include into the ERR the Department of Homeland Security's conclusions regarding the national economic impacts of an unplanned Poe Lock closure. We also favor proposed provisions that ensure that the Great Lakes Navigation System receives 10 percent of funds allocated to the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund through 2024. Both of these measures are of vital importance to the Great Lakes region, and Grand Rapids encourages Congress to include them in a final WRDA bill in 2016.

Having Congress pass and the President sign a Water Resources Development Act in 2016 would be a welcomed return to the practice of passing important water infrastructure every two years. With the 2016 election season ramping up, the time for Congress to address these issues is waning. It is critical to enact these necessary reforms and to fund and support the maintenance and development of safe and clean drinking water systems nationwide.

Thank you for your consideration. We appreciate the support in passing this legislation.

Sincerely,



Rosalynn Bliss