

Office of the Mayor

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November 9, 2016

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan,

As the Mayor of the City of Racine, I write to urge you to bring H.R. 5303 — the *Water Resources Development Act of 2016* (WRDA) — before the House of Representatives and to highlight provisions from its sister bill in the Senate (S.2828) that should be included in a final version. As Mayor, I am familiar with the day-to-day needs of our public water utilities – specifically Racine Water Utility (RWU). With that perspective, I wish to impart the importance of WRDA to the health, livelihood, and financial well being of the people of Wisconsin's 1st.

The RWU provides retail water service to approximately 34,500 customers. Absent federal support enabled by statutes such as WRDA, funding for the Water Utility's operations comes largely from usage charges to the residents of Racine – located within Wisconsin's 1st district. While the RWU makes every effort to keep charges affordable, as a provider of life's greatest essential, certain costs cannot be avoided. These unavoidable costs fall squarely on the shoulders of your constituents.

The RWU is subject to EPA regulations regarding acceptable limits for contaminants in drinking water to ensure the health and well being of those it serves. However, given limited resources and aging infrastructure this task often proves difficult if not impossible. As recently as 2014 RWU fell out of compliance with the allowable limits for lead and copper sampling, but through hard work and careful monitoring RWU was able to rectify the issues for 2015. Access to federal funds made possible through WRDA is essential to ensuring that Racine residents never need to experience concern over the safety of their drinking water again.

Beyond the supply of drinking water to residents of Racine, the RWU is also responsible for minimizing the affects of extreme weather events. For example, in 2012 the basements of residents in the Racine Lutheran High School area flooded after a 12-hour deluge pounded the city. Despite the installation of a new pumping station in 2003, RWU's infrastructure was overcome by the event and the community suffered. A new project planned to prevent another flood event is in the

works, but comes with a \$9 million price tag—a nearly impossible cost in these harsh economic times. Without the availability of federal funding through WRDA it is likely this project will never get off the ground.

While I can speak personally to the negative effects that Racine would experience in the absence of the WRDA bill, it is not a stretch to assume that many other cities nationwide are similarly situated. Without the passage of the WRDA bill this September communities throughout the United States will suffer. We have already seen the effects that underfunding of water resources has had in places such as Flint. I urge you to place the WRDA bill on the calendar for consideration, so we can avoid similar catastrophes in the future.

As the WRDA bill's language is finalized in conference, six sections in particular are most crucial to Racine for inclusion:

H.R. 5303 Section 191 – Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

Section 191 of the House version of the WRDA of 2016 bill (H.R. 5303) – titled “Great Lakes Restoration Initiative” – allows for a grant program to achieve the goals of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). The section began as a separate bill (H.R. 223) introduced by Rep. Joyce and has since been incorporated entirely in the current version of H.R. 5303. Both the Senate and House versions of the bill contain a GLRI section, however, Racine prefers the language found in the House version as it more effectively achieves the GLRI goals.

S. 2848 Section 4018 Waterfront Community Revitalization and Resiliency

Section 4018 of the Senate version of the WRDA of 2016 bill – titled “Waterfront Community Revitalization and Resiliency” – develops a new network of the newly defined ‘resilient waterfront communities.’ The communities will develop strategic plans for addressing issues that uniquely affect waterfront areas and will participate in a nation-wide network to share best practices. The section also authorizes federal assistance to these communities as they carry out the design and implementation of their strategic plan. A similar provision (S. 1935) passed the Senate with unanimous consent and is currently at the Speaker's desk.

S. 2848 Section 7201 Sewer Overflow Control Grants

Section 7201 of the Senate version of the WRDA of 2016 bill – titled “Sewer Overflow Control Grants” – amends the current grant system to administer the program more effectively. Under current law, the Administrator may only distribute grant funds in a fiscal year when \$1.35 billion is appropriated to that section. Section 7201 would remove that restriction. The section also brings reporting requirements into line with those of the comparable state revolving loan fund requirements – allowing potential grantees to only need to know one set of

reporting rules. Finally, the priority given to certain grant applicants has been adjusted to be more straightforward by providing priority to only two groups of applicants and prioritizing certain project types – with the added flexibility of being able to update the project types in fiscal year 2019.

S. 2848 Section 7203 Integrated Plans

Section 7203 of the Senate version of the WRDA of 2016 bill – titled “Integrated Plans” – allows municipalities burdened by overly ambitious compliance schedules to seek relief from the rigid and often unfunded statutory mandates. The plans are analogous to National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits, which allows leeway in compliance schedules to excessively burdened entities. The integrated plans would not be a permanent permit, but rather a realistic compliance timeline.

S. 2848 Section 7204 Green Infrastructure Promotion

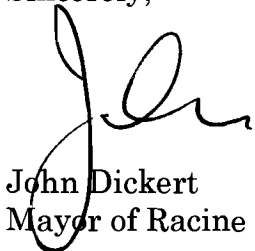
Section 7204 of the Senate version of the WRDA of 2016 bill – titled “Green Infrastructure Promotion” – requires the Administrator to promote green infrastructure. The section also requires the Administrator to direct EPA regional offices to promote and integrate green infrastructure plans in all outreach, research, permitting, and construction activities. Finally, the section directs the Administrator to develop and maintain a public internet exchange for green infrastructure ideas and technical information.

S. 2848 Section 7303 Water Infrastructure Investment Trust Fund

Section 7303 of the Senate version of the WRDA of 2016 bill – titled “Water Infrastructure Investment Trust Fund” – develops a fund to provide capitalization grants for programs under section 601 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act and section 1452 of the Safe Drinking Water Act. The trust is funded by the sale of a three-cent label that sellers can affix to products to show their participation in the fund. In addition, the section directs the Administrator to conduct and study to assess the affordability gap for drinking water systems in various low-income rural and urban areas.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss further, if necessary.

Sincerely,



John Dickert
Mayor of Racine