

February 22, 2024

Chair Patty Murray  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairwoman Kay Granger  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Vice Chair Susan Collins  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Chairwoman Granger and Ranking Member DeLauro:

More than 2 million Americans live without basic access to safe drinking water and sanitation<sup>1</sup> and the investments required to close this access gap easily exceed \$1 billion. As Congress determines Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 funding levels, we respectfully ask that Senate and House Appropriators promote federal funding programs that provide access to clean water and adequate wastewater infrastructure in the final versions of the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill and the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill to be considered by both chambers in the coming weeks.

Specifically, the undersigned organizations representing rural technical assistance providers, associations, environmental policy organizations and private well and decentralized wastewater professionals respectfully urge Congressional negotiators to:

- Fund the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Decentralized Water Systems Grant program<sup>2</sup> at \$20 million for FY 2024, as passed by the Senate<sup>3</sup>; and
- Accept the House-passed<sup>4</sup> amount of \$5 million for FY 2024 for the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) grant program for the construction and refurbishing of household decentralized wastewater (septic) systems for individuals with low or moderate income.

The USDA's Rural Decentralized Water Systems Grant program has demonstrated success in supporting loans and grants to low- and moderate-income households in rural areas for the installation, treatment, or upgrades of private water wells. The 2018 Farm Bill expanded this program to include grants and loans for constructing or upgrading onsite decentralized

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.digdeep.org/close-the-water-gap>

<sup>2</sup> 7 USC 1926e

<sup>3</sup> Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 (H.R. 4366) – Nov. 1, 2023

<sup>4</sup> Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2024 (H. Rept. 118-155) - July 19, 2023

wastewater systems in areas not served by a public utility. Now, thousands of households which are often found clustered in densely populated developments in areas where central sewer connection is not possible are eligible for these grants and loans. Onsite decentralized wastewater systems offer cost-effective, long-term solutions appropriate for qualifying individual households, neighborhoods, and communities. The goals of this program are met when low- and moderate-income households and communities are educated and provided with the best decentralized wastewater option. Funding this program at \$20 million for FY 2024 will help people living with malfunctioning septic systems and well water protect their drinking and surface waters from natural and man-made pollutants in the environment and stop further contamination from antiquated and under-maintained septic systems.

The EPA grant for construction and refurbishing of decentralized wastewater systems for people with low- or moderate-income was established in Sec. 50208 of the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and was authorized at \$50,000,000 a year through FY 2026. This grant program is critical to ensuring that underserved and rural communities are afforded the resources needed to provide every American with basic wastewater infrastructure. Funding this program at the House-passed amount of \$5 million in the FY 2024 bill is critically important, as this new program has not yet been implemented by the EPA because it has yet to be funded by Congress. FY 2024 funding will empower the agency to stand up this program and begin delivering resources where they are needed most.

These two programs play an essential role in providing Americans with clean drinking water and mechanisms for properly functioning wastewater systems in underserved communities in the United States. We stand ready to serve as a resource to you as Congress works to finalize the appropriations bills that facilitate these programs.

Sincerely,

National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association (NOWRA)

DigDeep

International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO)

National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA)

National Association of Wastewater Technicians (NAWT)

National Environmental Health Association (NEHA)

National Ground Water Association (NGWA)

Ocean Sewage Alliance (OSA)

Portable Sanitation Association International (PSAI)

Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC)

Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP)

US Water Alliance

Water Environment Federation (WEF)

Water Systems Council