April 10, 2020

The Honorable Marco Rubio
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Federal Assistance to Florida Water and Wastewater Utilities During the COVID-19 Crisis

Dear Senator Rubio,

Thank you for your leadership and swift action to confront the public health crisis caused by COVID-19. While the recent enacted CARES Act brought much needed relief to many societal sectors, it failed to include funding for water and wastewater utilities. We understand there will be additional Congressional action and we respectfully request the urgent need for water and wastewater utility funding is addressed in the fourth COVID-19 response legislation.

Clean water and wastewater utilities throughout Florida and across the nation provide life-sustaining services that protect public health. Our utilities provide safe drinking water to our customers and treat wastewater and safely return it to the environment which includes a whole host of beneficial uses. Our processes are specifically designed to treat viruses and protect the public, and it is for this reason we ask for your help.

We will continue to work through this crisis alongside other first responders in our communities. Our dedicated staff are taking remarkable steps and making personal sacrifices to ensure continued production of safe water and wastewater services are available for all Floridians. Some utilities have even assembled teams of employees to shelter in place at their facilities to ensure continued production of water supply, provision of wastewater services, and to provide oversight of facilities.

Public water and wastewater utilities must continue to provide essential services to their communities; despite the financial challenges utilities will incur due to falling revenue from declines in usage from commercial and industrial users, maintaining service to delinquent rate-payers who cannot afford their bills, halting shut-offs for non-payment, and moving forward whenever possible with near term critical infrastructure projects.
The National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) conservatively estimates the nationwide impact of lost revenue, due to coronavirus, to clean water utilities alone will be $12.5 billion. This is a low-end estimate, assuming an average loss of revenue of 20%, which is well within the range of what individual utilities are already projecting. Some utilities are anticipating closer to a 30% or 40% loss in revenue. This loss of revenue comes in addition to emergency operational costs Florida water and wastewater utilities will undoubtedly incur throughout the duration of the pandemic.

These significant losses and costs may have to be passed to our customers, many of whom are already experiencing severe financial distress due to impacts from the coronavirus. This is particularly the case where existing bond restrictions limit the ability of utilities to forgive past due bills.

As Congress considers additional coronavirus response legislation, we urge that the following be included in the bill:

- Federal assistance to cover costs associated with moratoriums on water service disconnections, or reconnections of delinquent accounts, water systems have implemented in response to the pandemic;
- Grant or low interest loan funding to help support water and wastewater utility functions at a time when revenues are dropping dramatically;
- Creation and funding of a program to assist disadvantaged water and wastewater customers with their bills, similar to the existing Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) program;
- Funding specifically to stimulate and accelerate near term critical water and wastewater infrastructure projects; and
- Inclusion of and increased funding for all water and wastewater utility providers through existing water and wastewater infrastructure investment programs such as the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA’s) Clean Water and Safe Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) and Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) programs.
The water sector takes extreme pride and responsibility in providing the world’s most important resource – WATER – safely and consistently to the public. Strong congressional support will greatly assist us to continue this critical public service during this crisis and beyond. On behalf of the statewide organizations and individual utilities listed below, we thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Florida Section American Water Works Association Water Utility Council
Kevin Carter - kcarter@fsawwa.org
Florida Water Environment Association Utility Council
Paul K. Steinbrecher, P. E. - SteiPK@jea.com
Florida Water Rural Association
Gary Williams - Gary.Williams@frwa.net
Florida's Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network
Scott Kelly - kellsd@gmail.com

Ave Maria Utility Company, LLLP
Bonita Springs Utilities, Inc.
Boynton Beach Utilities
City of Altamonte Springs
City of Boca Raton
City of Casselberry
City of Clearwater Utilities
City of Cocoa Beach
City of Cooper City
City of Coral Springs
City of Edgewater Environmental Services
City of Hollywood, Florida
City of Lakeland
City of New Port Richey
City of Oakland Park, Florida
City of Plantation
City of Pompano Beach
City of St. Petersburg
City of Tallahassee
City of Tampa
City of West Palm Beach
Clay County Utility Authority
Destin Water Users, Inc.
Emerald Coast Utilities Authority
Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority
Gainesville Regional Utilities
Gasparilla Island Water Association, Inc.
Hillsborough County
JEA
Lake Cane Restoration Society
Miami-Dade Water and Sewer Department
Okaloosa County Water & Sewer System
Orange County Utilities
Orlando Utilities Commission
Pace Water System
Peace River Manasota Regional WSA
Pinellas County Utilities
St. Johns County Utility Department
Tampa Bay Water
Toho Water Authority
Town of Davie Utilities
Town of Jupiter