



PRESIDENT

Diane S. Taniguchi-Dennis
Chief Executive Officer
Clean Water Services
Hillsboro, OR

VICE PRESIDENT

William J. "Mickey" Conway
Chief Executive Officer
Metro Water Recovery
Denver, CO

TREASURER

Kyle Dreyfuss-Wells
Chief Executive Officer
Northeast Ohio Regional
Sewer District
Cleveland, OH

SECRETARY

Laura Briefer
Director
Salt Lake City Department
of Public Utilities
Salt Lake City, UT

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Adam Krantz

1130 Connecticut Ave NW
Suite 1050
Washington DC 20036

T (202) 833-2672
F (888) 267-9505

www.nacwa.org

September 10, 2024

The Honorable Kamala Harris
Harris for President
P.O. Box 19102
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Vice President Harris,

On behalf of the National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA), please accept our congratulations on a successful Democratic National Convention and being the Democratic candidate for President of the United States.

As our nation heads toward the Presidential election and with an array of national environmental issues at a critical juncture for the Nation's public health and our economic future, I am writing to urge your campaign to focus on several urgent clean water priorities.

NACWA represents over 350 public wastewater and stormwater utilities nationwide, which range from large urban utilities to small rural utilities, which collectively provide clean water services to more than 150 million Americans daily. These essential services protect public health and the environment, create solid jobs, and are vital for local economic growth.

With costs rising to maintain existing water infrastructure, building new infrastructure, meeting new environmental challenges, and with complex requirements from federal and state regulators that add to local affordability challenges, we need your leadership to ensure the availability of innovative approaches as well as the needed financial assistance to ensure clean water progress is sustained.

As the campaign season progresses, NACWA and its public clean water utility members respectfully request that you elevate water infrastructure as a core priority of your campaign. Clean water is a household issue that poll after poll shows voters of both parties and from coast-to-coast care deeply about. And as one of the most basic human needs and determinants of the quality of life, it deserves significant attention on the campaign trail.

As you consider your policy platforms for 2024 and beyond, we urge you to address the following critical issues.

Tackling Water Affordability

The affordability of water services is a growing concern for households across the country. Rising water and wastewater rates, driven by the need to address aging infrastructure and meet new regulatory requirements, have placed a substantial financial burden on vulnerable populations.

The average annual wastewater service charge for a single-family household grew at twice the rate of inflation between 2000 and 2021, reaching \$551 (just for wastewater treatment services – with drinking water treatment added to this, total average water bills are over \$1,000 per household. Clean water utility rates are projected to continue increasing, by approximately 4% per year through 2026¹.

To help address the instability that rising water costs create, Congress established a temporary Low Income Household Drinking Water and Wastewater Assistance Program (LIHWAP) in 2021. Modeled after the highly successful, long-standing Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), LIHWAP served over 1.7 million American households, through the reconnection of water services, prevention of service shutoffs, and reduction of water rates².

Unfortunately, funding for this critical lifeline expired in 2024. NACWA urges your campaign to support the creation of a permanent national low-income water assistance program to build on LIHWAP's positive impact to those most in need of assistance.

Accelerating Infrastructure Investment

Water infrastructure investment is an increasingly recognized national priority.

The recent release of the long-awaited 2022 EPA Clean Watershed Needs Survey Report³ underscored the infrastructure investment gap, finding an estimated \$630.1 billion of unfunded clean water investment needs over the next 20 years. Overall, 55 percent of the total need identified in the survey is for investment in centralized wastewater treatment plants and collection systems, with 18 percent of the need coming from municipal stormwater.

The Clean Water State Revolving Fund, the key federal financial program for local water infrastructure projects, has seen its annual funding – aside from the helpful but short-term Bipartisan Infrastructure Law investments– remain stagnant for many years. NACWA urges that this and other core federal water infrastructure programs be funded at increased levels which are adequate to help utilities make

¹ 2022 Report: The Growing U.S. Water Affordability Challenge and the Need for Federal Low-Income Water Customer Assistance Funding [https://www.nacwa.org/docs/default-source/resources---public/nacwa-affordability-report_dec22.pdf?sfvrsn=1ab5c761_2]

² HHS The Low Income Household Water Assistance Program Data Dashboard [<https://lihwap-hhs-acf.opendata.arcgis.com>]

³ EPA 2022 EPA Clean Watershed Needs Survey Report, released May 2024 [<https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-05/2022-cwns-report-to-congress.pdf>]

necessary investments to protect their infrastructure and build a strong, healthy future for their communities.

PFAS: Ensure Polluters, Not the Public, Pay

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) have emerged as one of the most pressing environmental and public health challenges of our time. These "forever chemicals" are widespread, persistent in the stream of commerce and as such in the environment and linked to serious health risks. As public awareness of PFAS grows, so too does the urgency to find solutions for PFAS pollution.

Clean water utilities are at the frontlines of this challenge, acting as "passive receivers" of PFAS contamination. Clean water utilities do not produce, use nor profit from PFAS, yet they are facing an immense burden to manage these substances as they enter wastewater and stormwater systems from businesses and households alike. On top of this burden, under the current legal framework, clean water utilities face additional cleanup liability under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA). This liability will impose crippling financial costs that will be passed on to ratepayers, many of whom are already struggling with rising water bills and who should not have to shoulder the additional burden of paying to clean up the pollution chemical companies have long profited from producing.

NACWA strongly urges your campaign to champion addressing the PFAS challenge in an equitable way that reduces human health and environmental risks and holds the true polluters accountable. This includes protecting water systems from CERCLA liability and ensuring a greater focus from the federal government is placed on source control and research into safer PFAS alternatives and PFAS destruction technologies. These investments will help clean water utilities in turn focus on their mission of providing clean and safe water services to all, not on litigation about who is going to pay for the decades of legacy contamination caused by PFAS manufacturers.

Supporting a Resilient Water Workforce and Innovative Technologies

Ensuring every community in the U.S. has access to reliable clean water services depends on the resiliency of the water workforce, but water utilities are facing challenges in recruiting, training, and retaining employees, as well as high retirement rates. The sector needs a new generation of skilled workers to operate and maintain critical water infrastructure.

NACWA encourages your campaign to support the expansion of federal water workforce grants, with a particular focus on partnerships between community colleges, vocational schools, veterans, and local water utilities. These programs can help tap into a new generation of skilled workers who can fill vital roles in their community through the clean water sector.

Similarly, as smart technologies and artificial intelligence reshape all sectors of our economy — including the water sector — NACWA would like to ensure the continuous training up of the water workforce to meet these new opportunities and to see the federal government as a full partner in the research, development, piloting and more rapid adoption of technologies that will ensure more

efficient and sustainable water treatment as well as better public health and environmental outcomes.

Protecting Vital Infrastructure from Emerging Cyber Threats

Cybersecurity is an increasingly important issue for public clean water agencies, which play a crucial role in safeguarding public health and the environment. Many utilities have taken proactive measures to enhance their cybersecurity. Tools such as WaterISAC, the international security network created by and for the water & wastewater sector, as well as technical guidance from federal agencies are available to help utilities stay abreast of threats, guide them toward evolving best practices and provide incident response if necessary. We urge your campaign to continue prioritizing cybersecurity and the expansion of technical and financial assistance to help utilities address these growing threats to national security.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and focus on clean water and vital infrastructure issues facing communities around the country. NACWA and its members are happy to provide additional information and insight on these issues to your campaign in any way that would be helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Nathan Gardner-Andrews, NACWA's Chief Advocacy Officer, at 202.833.3692 or ngardner-andrews@nacwa.org with any questions or for more information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Krantz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Adam Krantz
CEO