December 16, 2024

The Honorable Alex Padilla
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Padilla and Senator Murkowski,

The Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA) and the Water Utility Climate Alliance (WUCA) are pleased to support S. 5361, the *Improving Atmospheric River Forecasts Act*, and we thank you for your leadership on this important topic. This legislation will create a dedicated program at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to study atmospheric rivers, improve forecasting, and reduce risks to our water systems from potential catastrophes.

Atmospheric rivers, which occur when water vapor becomes highly concentrated into a narrow corridor in the atmosphere, can be thousands of miles long and provide up to half of annual precipitation to the West Coast. Although they often bring necessary rainfall, these occurrences can also produce massive quantities of rain, causing extreme flooding, landslides, and infrastructure damage.

AMWA and WUCA value investment in research on atmospheric rivers and how to better predict flooding events that could damage drinking and wastewater systems. Flooding can have many detrimental impacts to water utilities, including power loss, asset damage, and disrupted service to customers. While water utilities continue efforts to build resiliency to severe weather events such as flooding, improved forecasting would help with emergency preparedness.

Atmospheric rivers are especially common on the West Coast and have been associated with 80 percent of all flood damages in the region, amounting to approximately $1 billion per year. Additionally, much of the West Coast is arid and susceptible to extended droughts. If water systems had more data and predictive capacity on impending floods, it would enable more flexible and resilient water management. For example, with better modeling, reservoir operators could implement forecast-informed plans to save additional water after a storm for the dry summer or release water in advance of a predicted atmospheric river storm.

In the long run, this improved water system resiliency benefits drinking and wastewater utilities by providing more predictable, consistent water flows and minimizing disruptions to systems. AMWA and WUCA support the *Improving Atmospheric River Forecasts Act* and the establishment of a program to study and mitigate risks from atmospheric rivers.

Thank you, and we look forward to working with you on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies
Water Utility Climate Alliance