



October 17, 2024

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair, House Committee on Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, House Committee on
Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair, Senate Committee on
Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chair Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro/Chair Murray and Vice Chair Collins:

The recent damage caused by Hurricanes Helene and Milton has impacted countless Americans across the Southern United States and left devastated communities struggling to rebuild. As the Water Affordability Coalition, a group made up of national water organizations that represent water systems around the country, many of our members are working around the clock to restore service so that families have access to clean and safe water.

Unfortunately, this damage comes at a time when funding for a successful water support and infrastructure program has run out. The Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) is a critical program that helps low-income families pay their water bills and provides needed resources for water systems to invest in their infrastructure.

It is important that as communities rebuild, they have the necessary resources for immediate needs as well as resiliency against future natural disasters. **The coalition is requesting \$500 million in LIHWAP funding in the natural disaster supplemental to provide funding assistance for low-income families and ensure that water systems have the resources to protect against future disasters.**

The one-two punch of Helene and Milton has placed a heavy burden on local utilities. Currently, parts of western North Carolina are still struggling without access to safe and clean water. According to the EPA, they have been working with local water systems and state partners to restore service to 75 drinking water systems that serve 260,000 people in and around Asheville.¹ In addition, water systems across 11 counties in Florida have issued boil water notices resulting from damage from Hurricane Milton.²

¹ <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-administrator-michael-s-regan-joins-bipartisan-north-carolina-leaders-support>

² <https://www.newsweek.com/hurricane-milton-sparks-slew-boil-water-notices-florida-1967355>

While we are still coming to terms with the extent of the impact of these hurricanes, we know the impact that previous disasters have inflicted. For example, after Hurricane Harvey in 2017, 61 drinking water systems and 40 wastewater systems were declared inoperable and 203 boil water notices were issued.³ After Hurricane Katrina, 1,220 drinking water systems and 200 wastewater systems were negatively affected, and service was significantly disrupted for customers.⁴

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency studies estimate that \$1.25 trillion of investment in our water infrastructure is needed over the next twenty years just to maintain current levels of service.⁵ That does not include new financial burdens borne by new water regulations. Natural disasters push that cost even higher, testing system resilience and potentially pushing affordable water bills out of reach for many in need. For these reasons, it's critical that programs like LIHWAP continue to be authorized and funded so they can support our country's infrastructure needs and provide resources to our most vulnerable communities.

The Water Affordability Coalition applauds your dedication to helping Americans rebound from these natural disasters, and we appreciate your consideration of including critical LIHWAP funding.

Sincerely,

American Water Works Association
Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies
National Association of Clean Water Agencies
National Association of Water Companies
Water Environment Federation

³ https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2019-07/documents/epaig_20190716_19-p-0236.pdf

⁴ https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20061215_RS22285_4c1ac949fff40f0e2a1dff6d7f79297888b66ef0.pdf

⁵ [https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2024/09/05/water-system-upgrades-could-require-more-than-\\$1-trillion-over-next-20-years](https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2024/09/05/water-system-upgrades-could-require-more-than-$1-trillion-over-next-20-years)