



Representative Marcia L. Fudge

Event: Transportation & Infrastructure Members' Day Hearing

Event Theme: Water Resources Development Act of 2020

Date and Time: Thursday, February 27, 2020 at XX

Word Count: 450 (3 minutes)

Chairwoman Napolitano, Ranking Member Westerman, and members of the House Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment:

Thank you for holding this Members' Day hearing on the Water Resources Development Act and allowing me to discuss an issue of critical importance to people across the country, including the residents of the 11th Congressional District in Northeast Ohio.

Access to clean water is a basic human right. Yet, as the cost of water utilities continues to rise, far too many Americans are at risk of losing access to this basic necessity. Nationwide, water and sewer bills have increased by more than 30 percent since 2012, nearly triple the rate of inflation. This rapid rise in rates for drinking water and wastewater is particularly harmful to low-income families. Today, water is reportedly unaffordable for 14 million households, or around one in every 10 households in America.

The problem will only get worse. A 2017 report issued by researchers at Michigan State University predicted nearly one-in-three households could be priced out of access to clean water within five years. Those who fall behind on their water utility payments could have their services shut off, threatening their access to the water they need to cook, drink, and bathe.

Meanwhile, as Americans struggle to pay their water bills, utility companies in Ohio and across the country are increasingly unable to make much-needed repairs and upgrades to their aging water infrastructure systems. The continued decline in the network of pipes that deliver our water supply will only lead to higher costs, further surpassing the ability of vulnerable populations to pay their water bills.

For this reason, I introduced the Low-Income Water Customer Assistance Programs Act last year with Representative John Katko of New York.

The bill directs the EPA to establish pilot programs nationwide to award grants to utilities to assist low-income people with paying their drinking water and wastewater bills. The legislation also requires EPA to conduct a needs assessment for a permanent, nationwide water assistance program. Companion legislation was introduced in the Senate by Senator Cardin of Maryland and Senator Wicker of Mississippi.

Such a program will not only ensure low-income Americans have access to water services, it will help communities maintain critical infrastructure networks and meet public health standards. It is past time we do something to ensure every American has access to clean water, regardless of location or income.

This bipartisan, bicameral bill is an important step towards improving the affordability of water services for low-income Americans and ensuring our water infrastructure is safe, reliable, and up to date. I hope you will consider inclusion of this bill as you develop priorities for a new Water Resources Development Act of 2020.

Thank you.