

July 16, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson and Leader Jeffries:

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) writes to express its support for H.R. 8812, the Water Resources Development Act of 2024, and encourages its swift passage by the House of Representatives. The nation's dams, levees, ports, and inland waterways infrastructure systems are essential to public safety, economic development and growth, and preservation of environmental resources. These infrastructure systems protect hundreds of communities from flooding, support millions of jobs, and generate trillions of dollars in economic activity. Many of these systems, however, have reached the end of their design life, and the investment gap must be closed if we hope to both repair and modernize these systems to be competitive in the 21st century.

We would like to express our appreciation to the leaders on the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee for keeping WRDA passage on schedule for 2024. Since 2014, Congress has passed a final WRDA agreement every two years, and thanks to the efforts of committee leaders and staff, this year's bill remains on that trajectory. WRDA provides an opportunity to demonstrate bipartisan collaboration in support of the nation's water resources infrastructure. The biennial schedule provides the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) with a degree of predictability which allows for more effective planning and development of vital water resources projects nationwide.

Several provisions in this year's WRDA legislation are essential to strengthening public safety, improving infrastructure resilience, and providing more effective services to the American people. H.R. 8812 is an opportunity to build on progress made in recent years, as well as new opportunities for growth.

Specifically, ASCE supports critical efforts made to improve the safety of the nation's dams. Section 128 of the House's WRDA bill would officially reauthorize the National Dam Safety Program (NDSP). The NDSP is the primary source of federal funding that goes directly to states to support their own dam safety programs. Activities supported by NDSP State Assistance Grants include inspection and monitoring, emergency preparedness, and staffing and training needs. The NDSP's legislative authorization officially expired on September 30, 2023. Section

128 reauthorizes this critical program through 2028, and increases the total grant amounts states may be able to receive from the program by eliminating unnecessary funding restrictions. This section also makes key reforms to the High Hazard Potential Dam Rehabilitation Grant program by improving access to competitive grants for disadvantaged communities in need of necessary dam repairs, as well as clarifying eligibility and application requirements.

Section 128 would also build on progress made in WRDA 2022 to account for the nation's low-head dams. Low-head dams are small, river spanning structures which produce dangerous, but undetectable currents that pose significant public safety concerns. Low-head dams may be difficult to identify, leaving the public unaware of the hazards they pose. In 2022, WRDA authorized the creation of a low-head dam inventory to improve safety around these structures. H.R. 8812 builds on this by requiring low-head dams to be incorporated into the National Inventory of Dams. This will help better identify these structures and allow for greater safety precautions to protect the public.

ASCE also supports efforts in H.R. 8812 to improve navigation of the nation's inland waterways. Section 115 would provide greater flexibility for how projects are selected under the Inland Waterways Regional Dredge Pilot Program, first authorized in WRDA 2022, by allowing USACE to award projects that improve inland waterway navigability, increase freight capacity, and have the potential to enhance the availability of containerized cargo. Dredging is critically important to keeping inland waterways navigable and efficient. Improving the nation's dredging capability will help to address the \$45 billion in water transportation needs reflected in ASCE's recently released [*Bridging the Gap*](#) economic study.

Additionally, sections 112 through 114 of H.R. 8812 would provide needed support for the nation's emerging, remote, and underserved community harbors. These provisions would help improve how non-federal cost share requirements are met, support projects to improve remote harbors and support surrounding communities, improve the ability of USACE to carry out harbor projects for underserved communities. The nation's remote, emerging, and underserved community harbors have the potential to contribute to the nation's economic growth, create jobs, and improve environmental justice. The provisions outlined in these sections would greatly serve these efforts.

Another important provision in H.R. 8812 involves improvement of USACE's project permitting process. Section 106 would require the establishment of a single USACE office dedicated to coordinating and providing guidance for permit applications for non-federal water resources projects. Section 107 would implement a system for electronic preparation and submission of project permit applications, as well as track documents related to environmental reviews online. ASCE supports efforts across the federal government to reduce delays and improve project permitting practices, without adversely affecting the environment. These provisions will help to improve efficiency within the process and create greater transparency in project permitting.

Finally, ASCE supports efforts in H.R. 8812 to allow the National Levee Safety Program to continue its development. The National Levee Safety Program was first authorized in 2007, and it will ultimately be tasked with supporting efforts to stand up state levee safety programs, implement national guidelines for levee safety, and support rehabilitation of aging levee systems

nationwide. Section 302 includes a provision to further extend this critical program through 2033. In 2022, WRDA officially reauthorized the program through 2028. Extending the National Levee Safety Program for an additional five years will allow it to flourish into the program it was intended to become, supporting levee safety and enhancing flood protection nationwide.

ASCE thanks House leadership for its commitment to the nation's water resources infrastructure, and we encourage you to bring H.R. 8812, the Water Resources Development Act of 2024 to the House floor and support its ultimate passage. We welcome the opportunity to work with you and your staff on this critical legislation and encourage you to contact Matthew McGinn (mmcginn@asce.org) with our Government Relations team.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Caroline Sevier". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Caroline Sevier
Managing Director,
Government Relations and Infrastructure Initiatives
American Society of Civil Engineers