



COMMITTEE ON *DEMOCRATS*
ENERGY & COMMERCE
RANKING MEMBER FRANK PALLONE, JR.

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**Statement of Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr., as prepared for delivery
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy
Hearing on “S. 611, the Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems
Assistance Act”**

I am pleased that the Subcommittee is returning to the important issue of drinking water safety. We started this Congress by examining some emerging drinking water threats, including toxic blue green algae. The legislation this Subcommittee passed on harmful algal blooms is now taking effect, and it has set us on a path to address that serious threat.

We also held a hearing back in February on problems facing rural water systems. As we heard then, these systems are facing serious threats from outdated infrastructure, lack of funding, and extreme weather. We in Congress have continued to underfund infrastructure improvements and have continued to undermine efforts to address climate change, so we should expect these problems to get worse before they get better.

Resources are central to any conversation about safe drinking water. Much of our nation’s drinking water infrastructure is well beyond its useful life, and in desperate need of replacement. Investing in drinking water infrastructure protects public health, creates jobs, and boosts the economy.

It is imperative that this Subcommittee take on the important task of reauthorizing the drinking water State Revolving Fund (SRF). The longer we put off drinking water repairs, the more pressing the public health threats become.

But the Subcommittee is not tackling that important task today. Instead, the majority is focused on the small pot of money set aside for technical assistance for small public water systems. This money, distributed through grantees including the National Rural Water Association (NRWA) and the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP), has been important for small systems, though it does not begin to close the infrastructure funding gap they face.

Both NRWA and RCAP will be represented on the panel today, and I look forward to hearing from them about how this program can be implemented to the greatest benefit for small systems and public health.

I expect the Committee and probably the House will move this legislation, and it will be signed by the President. This is a good step, and I welcome it.

But it is not the whole solution for small systems, or for our drinking water infrastructure. Small systems serve only 8% of the population. We should absolutely do what is necessary to ensure they have safe water, but we should also protect the other 92%. That means reauthorizing the SRF, ensuring that fracking is done safely, ensuring source water protection, addressing drought, and planning for climate change.

Like the algae bill we worked on earlier this year, this bill shows that we can come together to pass laws and address drinking water issues. I hope my Republican colleagues will see this as only the beginning.

I thank the Chairman for calling this hearing and particularly thank the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, Mr. Tonko, for his leadership on drinking water issues.

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