

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.**

Hearing on “The CLEAN Future Act and Drinking Water: Legislation to Ensure Drinking Water is Safe and Clean”

May 25, 2021

I want to thank Chairman Tonko for his long-standing leadership on drinking water issues, and for calling this hearing. Access to safe drinking water is essential to our health and prosperity as a nation. Unfortunately, it is far from guaranteed. And like many aspects of our lives, the Covid-19 pandemic has shown just how important, and how fragile, that access to safe drinking water is.

Aging infrastructure, tight state and local budgets, family budgets stretched to the limit, and climate change are all making the situation worse. Fortunately, the legislation we will consider today can help.

The President has called on us to invest \$111 billion in our nation’s water infrastructure – investments that can create good-paying jobs, protect public health, and strengthen communities. The bills before us could deliver the investments and benefits envisioned in the President’s American Jobs Plan and long supported by members of this Committee.

We will discuss legislation, from both sides of the aisle, that would extend important drinking water programs including the State Revolving Fund, as well as water resiliency, school drinking water safety, and tribal water programs.

We also have multiple bills before us to address customer water debt, including a bipartisan bill that would establish permanent rate assistance programs to help low-income customers pay their water bills.

And we will discuss legislation, from both sides of the aisle, that would deliver the funding called for in the American Jobs Plan to replace all lead service lines nationwide. The CLEAN Future Act, which I introduced earlier this year with Chairmen Tonko and Rush, invests \$45 billion over ten years to replace all lead service lines. It also prioritizes replacing the lines in disadvantaged and environmental justice communities.

Our states and water systems are trying to do the right thing – to find lead service lines and replace them. I look forward to hearing from the EPA today on how the agency and Congress can help states and water systems get it done.

In the past, we have had great success on this Committee of coming together to pass funding for drinking water infrastructure. Unfortunately, we have made less progress coming together to strengthen drinking water standards and ensure safer drinking water for all.

I hope we have reached a turning point in that effort. Bipartisan support for strengthening protections against lead and PFAS can point the way toward greater consensus on strengthening the law to provide safer water for all.

At last year's hearing on standard setting under the Safe Drinking Water Act, I noted that almost all our drinking water standards were set before the 1996 amendments to the statute. And the standards that have been set since have all been done under special statutory provisions. The end result is that over the last 25 years EPA has never managed to complete the general standard setting process called for under the Safe Drinking Water Act.

I hope we can all agree that is a problem.

Some of the bills before us would set deadlines for specific drinking water standards, carving a path for health protective standards for PFAS, microcystin, and 1,4 dioxane.

The AQUA Act of 2021, authored by Chairman Tonko and myself, would go further and take steps to fix the standard setting process for all contaminants. The narrow changes in that bill could make a huge difference for communities across the nation, and I hope they can be a part of bipartisan work going forward.

Over the last few months, I've often said that this moment of crisis provides us an opportunity to invest in our country, making it stronger, cleaner, healthier and better off. Drinking water legislation is a clear example of that opportunity. Every family should be able to trust that the water coming from their taps is safe. In order to make that happen, we must come together to enact real improvements to our drinking water systems.