

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.

Markup of 3 Bills

June 23, 2021

Today, the Committee will consider three important public health measures reported last week by the Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change. By acting today, we will deliver crucial drinking water improvements that communities desperately need. We will also meet the promise of President Biden's American Jobs Plan, by improving the safety and affordability of drinking water for all Americans. Finally, we will tackle PFAS contamination in our air, land, and water.

We will begin by considering the AQUA Act of 2021, authored by Chairman Tonko. This legislation provides significant federal funding to revitalize our nation's drinking water infrastructure and replace lead service lines nationwide. It provides funding for water resiliency programs, school drinking water safety programs, and Tribal water programs. And it provides funding to pay off water customer debt, helping families and water utilities navigate a debt crisis that puts both at risk.

Most importantly, the AQUA act would strengthen our drinking water standards and improve the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) ability to set those standards when needed. The Environment and Climate Change Subcommittee has held several hearings on standard setting challenges under the Safe Drinking Water Act or SDWA. The AQUA Act is not a full rewrite of the SDWA process, but it would make targeted changes that could empower the EPA. And it would set deadlines for several long overdue standards.

Drinking water infrastructure has long been an area of strong bipartisan agreement in this Committee, and I hope that drinking water safety can be as well.

The second bill we will consider today, The Low-Income Water Customer Assistance Program, is a bipartisan bill led by Representatives Blunt-Rochester and Katko. It would create permanent assistance programs to help low income customers pay their drinking water and wastewater bills, just as the LIHEAP program helps low income customers pay their energy bills. These permanent programs will be a safety net for low income customers, and the water systems that serve them. This bill enjoys widespread stakeholder support, and I expect it will have broad support today.

The last bill we will consider, the PFAS Action Act, was the product of robust work in this Committee last Congress. It passed the House last year on a strong bipartisan basis, and I am pleased that this Congress it is being led by Representatives Dingell and Upton.

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We heard at last week's subcommittee markup that some of my Republican colleagues want to delay this bill and hold new hearings, but we must act now. PFAS contamination is a pressing issue for countless communities, and while the EPA under President Biden is working hard to address the issue, it is still playing catchup after four years of inaction. One year after the House passed this bill, we still don't have a drinking water standard, a test rule, or a hazardous substance designation for even a single PFAS chemical.

So, this bill is still urgently needed, and I look forward to advancing it today.