Committee on Energy and Commerce

Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on "From Source to Tap: A Hearing to Examine Challenges and Opportunities for Safe, Reliable, and Affordable Drinking Water"

February 24, 2026

Today we will examine the state of our nation's drinking water infrastructure and the federal role in ensuring communities have safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water.

For far too long, our aging water infrastructure has been underfunded. In 2025 the American Society of Civil Engineers' report card gave the U.S. water infrastructure system a "C-" grade. While the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provided historic investments to address our infrastructure challenges, that funding was just a down payment on the $625 billion needed over the next 20 years. This number will continue to rise if investments fail to keep pace with our infrastructure needs.

Communities across the nation live with the consequences of this underinvestment – from legacy lead service lines in my home state of New Jersey to the sewage pipe break right here in Washington, D.C. Every sector depends on the delivery of safe, reliable water.

Unfortunately, the pipes underground are often forgotten until something bad happens. Out of sight, out of mind. But without water, life comes to a halt. We cannot afford to continue this piecemeal approach to addressing problems with our water infrastructure.

That is why reauthorizing and increasing funding levels for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, or SRF, is critical. The SRF is our main federal funding source for drinking water projects and helps water systems pay for capital improvements. It is an investment in public health and the economy.

Much of our infrastructure is from a bygone era. If we are serious about ensuring safe and reliable water for Americans, we must rebuild it to meet 21st century challenges. We need water systems that are prepared for and can adapt to our changing climate and increasing cyber threats. We need to consider ways to promote energy efficiency and conserve water – a significant amount of which we are losing to broken pipes and water mains. We must remove all lead service lines once and for all. Without adequate resources, the water sector will be unable to reliably deliver safe, affordable drinking water, leaving communities vulnerable to contaminants and disruptions in water service all together.

While the SRF is a cornerstone of the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Committee should also examine ways to modernize the law to meet the challenges of today. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has struggled to set and update drinking water standards that reflect the best available science. We saw some progress under the Biden Administration with the historic PFAS standards and the improved lead and copper rule. Regrettably, the chemical industry and water utilities have filed lawsuits challenging these health-protective standards, citing the costs of compliance. This puts these important protections in jeopardy.

I agree that the affordability of water is a real, pressing issue that is affecting millions of Americans. However I do not believe that we need to choose between affordable water and safe water. We can and must have both. That is why I have advocated for a permanent water assistance program at EPA, in addition to funding, technical assistance, and strong, health-protective drinking water standards. A permanent program will ensure that all Americans have access to safe, reliable water, and help utilities maintain access to water services.

Water is a basic right and essential to the health and prosperity of our country. Unfortunately, this is not a reality for too many communities. I hope that we can find ways – on a bipartisan basis – to support the water sector and invest in the future of Americans. We must seize the opportunity to deliver for the American people – their health and safety depend on it.

And with that, I yield back the balance of my time.