

Water Affordability, Transparency, Equity, and Reliability (WATER) Act

S. 916 **Sen. Bernie Sanders**

H.R. 1352 **Rep. Brenda Lawrence » Rep. Ro Khanna**

Across the country, water infrastructure is crumbling and millions of people lack reliable access to safe, drinkable water. The Water Affordability, Transparency, Equity, and Reliability (WATER) Act is the most comprehensive approach to improving our water systems to ensure that every person has access to safe, clean water in the United States. The WATER Act would provide the major financial investment needed to update our water infrastructure, repairing old and lead-ridden water pipes, stopping sewage overflows, and allowing for affordable, quality water services for everyone, while also creating nearly one million jobs.¹

Access to clean water is vital to public health

Water is life sustaining. Registered nurses understand the critical link between full access to clean, safe water and public health and safety.

- » For optimal health in our daily lives, we need clean water for drinking. Infants, children, and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to illness, dehydration, infection, and disease from water contamination and lack of access to water.
- » We need clean water for proper sanitation to combat the growth and spread of multiple infectious diseases and pandemics. Lack of water, like unsafe sanitation, is a major health disaster.

Water systems are failing, and Americans want a solution

- » Since 1977, there has been a 74 percent decline² in federal funding in real dollars (82 percent per capita) for water infrastructure. This massive decrease in funding has led to aging pipes, pipe breakage, contamination, and wasted water.
- » According to the Environmental Protection Agency, public water systems need to invest \$472.6 billion on infrastructure improvements over 20 years to ensure the provision of clean, safe drinking water.³
- » Nationwide, more than six million lead service lines deliver water to millions of people, putting them at risk of lead poisoning, which is particularly harmful for children. Lead poisoning can result in major neurological damage, organ failure, and death.
- » A growing number of Americans cannot afford their water bills as water prices rise.⁴ Studies suggest that prices will increase dramatically in the decades ahead, to perhaps four times current levels,⁵ making it increasingly difficult for marginalized communities across the country to get the clean, safe water our families rely on.
- » According to a 2019 survey,⁶ 85 percent of Americans support (with 52 percent strongly supporting) increasing federal investment to rebuild our water infrastructure. 67 percent of voters support a proactive program of water infrastructure upgrades, rather than fixing problems as they arise.



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The Water Affordability, Transparency, Equity, and Reliability Act

- » This legislation would create a trust fund to support the nation's aging water infrastructure, and would provide up to \$35 billion a year in dedicated funding to drinking water and wastewater improvements.
- » The bill would enable the funding of projects to address water contamination, remove lead service lines, improve school tap water, support public water, and support affordability programs to help prevent water shutoffs.
- » It would also provide support for improving water and sewer systems for small, rural and Native American communities, rural households, and disadvantaged communities.
- » The WATER Act would create nearly one million jobs, and would encourage the use of union labor for water infrastructure projects. It would mandate fair wages (requires Davis-Bacon prevailing wage law to be applied to all projects funded by the Drinking Water SRF and the Clean Water SRF programs) and would require the use of U.S.-made iron and steel on water system projects.

Sources »

- 1 <https://lawrence.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-lawrence-and-khanna-introduce-water-act-address-water-justice>.
- 2 https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/sites/default/files/fs_1902_waterjobsjustice-wateractupd2-web.pdf.
- 3 <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45304.pdf>.
- 4 <https://www.fastcompany.com/3067513/a-third-of-the-us-population-wont-be-able-to-afford-water-bills-in-just-5-years>.
- 5 <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0169488#pone.0169488.ref008>.
- 6 <http://thevalueofwater.org/sites/default/files/2019%20VOW%20ONE-PAGER.pdf>.

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