

The Safe Drinking Water Act (H.R. 417): To Amend the Safe Drinking Water Act to Require the Improvement of Consumer Confidence Reports and Stabilize Funding for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund

The Honorable John Yarmuth (D-KY 3rd)
United States House of Representatives
600 Martin Luther King Jr. Place – Suite 216
Louisville, KY 40202

February 1, 2017

Dear Representative Yarmuth:

Across the nation, in our state of Kentucky, and in my own home in Louisville, there are families paying for water contaminated by deadly chemicals and pollutants, which is why we urge you to join your colleague Representative Brenda L. Lawrence (D-MI 14th) in sponsoring an amendment to H.R. 417 to stabilize funding for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF), while streamlining the accessibility and understandability of consumer confidence reports¹. As you know, funding for the DWSRF was slashed in 2012 by 53%² and is under current scrutiny by the Trump administration to be cut further, as confirmed by Ms. Cheryl Parsons of the Environmental Protection Agency's 4th District Regional Office in an interview conducted on February 3rd, 2017. At a time when ground water conditions have worsened and cause deleterious effects on human health from pathogenic organisms and toxic chemical pollution³, Congress must work to protect our precious drinking water supply from further contamination. As H.R. 417 is being debated and the Safe Drinking Water Act is up for reauthorization, we believe the time is nigh to stabilize funding for the DWSRF as part of those larger efforts.

Unsafe and Deadly Drinking Water

According to the United States Department of Agriculture in 2008, over 70 percent of people over the age of two consume plain tap water each day⁴, and, unfortunately, the EPA told the *Guardian News* in 2016 that there are 33 cities in the U.S. with unsafe and even deadly levels of pollution in their drinking water.⁵ A 2016 Harvard study⁶ found unsafe levels of polyfluoroalkyl and perfluoroalkyl substances (PFASs) — industrial chemicals linked with cancer, hormone disruption and other health problems — in the drinking water of these 33 states, affecting six million Americans. Among these 33 cities, sir, is Bowling Green, Kentucky, which is considered

¹ <https://ofmpub.epa.gov/apex/safewater/f?p=136:102>

² <http://www.forbes.com/sites/ericagies/2012/06/28/spending-cuts-threaten-u-s-water-infrastructure/#7013c8927b14>

³ https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-12/documents/mayor_weaver_and_director_creagh_letter_0.pdf

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db242.htm>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/02/lead-water-testing-cheats-chicago-boston-philadelphia>

⁶ <http://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/translating-uncle-sam/stories/how-polluted-is-us-drinking-water>

to have some of the worst drinking water conditions in the nation. In fact, data from the EPA⁷ shows that nine states – Alabama, Arkansas, Hawaii, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nevada, North Dakota, South Dakota and Tennessee – have deadly levels of lead in their drinking water supplies. While media attention is turned to cities like Flint, Michigan⁸, we feel it is vital to look at the larger picture and consider a long-term fix for all the states and cities involved.

Amending H.R. 417 to Stabilize Funding for the DWSRF Program

One such fix is to fight against further cuts to the DWSRF, a fund administered by the EPA to provide grants to states to further the goals of the Safe Drinking Water Act⁹. In Kentucky, DWSRF money is used for the planning, design, and construction of drinking water intake, treatment, and distribution infrastructure. Similarly, these funds have been used for the preparation of emergency measures for the protection of public health. In 2016, Kentucky received \$12,000,000¹⁰ for the improvements of its water system, but cities like Louisville and Bowling Green have been left behind in order to address concerns in eastern Kentucky because of the high rate of coal pollution in that area. Non-coal producing cities simply do not have the capital to fix their water supply problems, leading many families to consume contaminated water on a daily basis. Such is the case with my (Danielle's) family in Louisville. Louisville Gas and Electric recently began dumping coal ash into the surrounding rivers, resulting in high levels of arsenic in the river and ground water, thus affecting the drinking water supply for me, my family, and my neighbors. There is just not enough funding in my town for the infrastructure to be renovated, and the water quality continues to worsen. Last year, our water supply was found to have high levels of mercury and lead contaminants, increasing our risk of cancer, lead poisoning, and other negative health effects.

While the Trump administration has pledged to invest as much as \$1 trillion¹¹ on infrastructure in the coming decade, there are no specifics published as to how much of this funding, if any, will be allocated to clean water solutions. It is estimated that \$300 billion is needed to replace all lead water pipes in the country and clean up the contaminated ground water supply. We urge you to partner with Representative Lawrence to fight for the life-saving DWSRF program by amending H.R. 417 to include stabilization efforts for its funding.

H.R. 417 and Consumer Confidence Reports

While stabilizing DWSRF funding would aid in water improvement infrastructure, H.R. 417 offers another component to help the public understand the plight of safe drinking water. As you know, consumer confidence reports are required by the EPA, and community water systems deliver an annual drinking water quality report to their customers. These reports are supposed to provide clear and up-to-date information about their local drinking water, including the sourcing of the water as well as a brief summary of the water's contamination risks; however, many Americans do not know they have access to these reports or, if they do, they do not know how to

⁷ <http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/24/americas-water-crisis-goes-beyond-flint-michigan.html>

⁸ <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/flint-water-crisis/2016/03/04/flint-crisis-could-cost-us-300b-lead-pipe-overhaul-agency-warns/81316860/>

⁹ <https://www.epa.gov/drinkingwatersrf/how-drinking-water-state-revolving-fund-works>

¹⁰ <http://www.lrc.ky.gov/Statcomm/CPAB/016-22syp/2016-2022completeplan.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.awwa.org/publications/connections/connections-story/articleid/4471/trump-115th-congress-and-the-water-sector.aspx>

interpret them. H.R. 417 will require that these reports are easily accessible and written in a way that is comprehensible to water customers.

Support and Amend H.R. 417

Representative Yarmuth, we understand that with a new administration comes new responsibilities and challenges, but we also know you have a strong record of fighting for Kentuckians and the environment, as demonstrated by your opposition to mountaintop removal (H.R. 786). We are confident that you know how vital it is that those who are affected by unsafe water conditions are heard as well. You and Representative Lawrence will change lives with your support of H.R. 417 and the amendment to stabilize DWSRF funding. We look forward to your support and your reply to our concerns.

Respectfully,

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H.R. 417 Project Proposal

Danielle Graves and Kerrington Maddox of Berea College

Overview

As access to safe drinking water continues to be a relevant concern, we were surprised at the lack of attention to this problem in the 115th Congress's legislative agenda. The only bill related to clean water is H.R. 410, requiring safe drinking water reports to be more legible and easily accessible. Therefore, we decided to write our letter to Representative John Yarmuth of Kentucky because of his record against mountaintop removal and environmental reform. We believe he will see the need to amend H.R. 410 to stabilize funding for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) from further cuts.

Goal

Danielle has a personal goal to help her family and her neighbors in Louisville, Kentucky fight for cleaner and safer drinking water. Beyond that personal goal, we want to raise awareness that there are 33 cities in addition to Flint, Michigan that need federal and state assistance to improve their water supply infrastructure.

Target Audience

We have three target audiences:

1. To empower water users by helping them learn to access and interpret the content of their local water reports.
2. We also want to lobby our local state Congressional legislators to utilize the funding provided by H.R. 417.
3. We also believe in the power of the press to urge legislative action. We plan to talk with the editors of our state newspapers to publish articles about our drinking water problems as well as our proposed solution so that we can garner support of our federal legislators.

Activities

1. We want to visit the water authorities in Bowling Green and Louisville – two of the 33 cities mentioned in our proposal – to discuss the nature of their water problems and what solutions they are considering, if granted the funding from the DWSRF.
2. Armed with the information from the above interviews, we want to design a media campaign aimed to spread awareness about these concerns and drum-up support for the proposed solutions. This campaign will consist of a series of poster designs that can be distributed to each city.
3. We also would like to produce a documentary that includes the everyday families affected by these water crises. We believe that seeing and hearing from those affected will be a more

impactful persuasive tool to garner support for regulatory changes and an increase in funding for DWSRF grants.

Budget Item	Supplies	Cost
Travel for Interviews	Hotel & Mileage	\$175
Poster Designs and Printing	100 initial poster prints	\$100
Documentary Travel	Hotel and Mileage for 3 Kentucky Cities	\$220
Rental of Equipment	Camera, tripods, recorders	in-kind
	TOTAL	\$495