September 6th, 2016

The Honorable John Cornyn
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cornyn,

On behalf of the undersigned state legislators, business leaders and conservation and civic organizations, we strongly urge you to support investment in the nation’s drinking and clean water infrastructure as part of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2016.

As you know, S.2848 – the Senate version of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2016 – authorizes more than $4.8 billion for programs under the Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act, including a $220 million aid package to address the Flint, Michigan crisis.

Unfortunately, water quality problems are not unique to Flint. Many of Texas’ drinking-water and clean-wastewater systems are falling into a state of disrepair. Each year, billions of gallons of water are lost in Texas when aging water pipes break, costing millions of dollars in repairs and economic losses. According to data from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, outdated water systems dumped at least 76 million gallons of raw sewage into our rivers, lakes, and streams in 671 separate incidents in 2015.

Our drinking water infrastructure also too often poses health risks to Texas families. According to a June 2016 report by the Natural Resources Defense Council, 6.6 million Texans were served by water systems with lead violations in 2015. And the Environmental Integrity Project found that drinking water systems that serve more than 51,000 people across 34 Texas communities had exceeded Safe Drinking Water standards for arsenic, a dangerous cancer-causing chemical.

These all-too-commonplace incidents endanger both the environment and public health, while also undermining economic growth.

Texas needs a major investment to help modernize our water infrastructure and protect public health and safety. In 2012, the American Society of Civil Engineers assigned Texas a grade of D- for drinking water infrastructure. In the “2011 Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey’s Report to Congress,” Texas reported water infrastructure needs of $33 billion in the next twenty years - the second greatest water infrastructure need in the nation.

Responding to this demand and the historic drought, local governments and the state of Texas have developed new funding sources to address these needs. However, in order to address the magnitude of the problem and to help keep water rates affordable, we can’t go it alone.

Many of these aging systems are in rural areas that do not have the population capacity to float bonds for needed repairs and to expand systems in anticipation of growth. Repairs in water delivery infrastructure are greatly needed in many rural communities in Texas to ensure conservation and keep
water rates affordable. Waste water upgrades are needed to make sure our lakes and rivers meet recreational standards. The Texas Water Development Board offers no-interest loans for infrastructure repairs but many small communities are in need of grants as they do not have the customer base needed to pay off these loans.

The Senate’s WRDA 2016 authorizes a number of critical programs to help communities update and maintain their drinking water and sewage-treatment systems. The bill helps “small and disadvantaged communities that lack basic drinking water or wastewater services with $1.4 billion in authorized funding over five years, and another grant program authorizes $300 million over five years for the replacement of lead water lines. An additional $1.8 billion in grants is authorized over a five-year period to address sewer overflows and stormwater discharges.”¹ The bill also promotes green infrastructure and innovative technologies to address drought and water supply needs.

As Congress works to pass a WRDA bill this summer, we strongly urge you to support inclusion of these clean water investments as part of the final package approved by the House and Senate.

Sincerely,

The Honorable José Rodriguez  
Texas State Senate, District 29  
100 N. Ochoa, Suite A  
El Paso, Texas 79901

The Honorable Sarah Davis  
Texas State Representative, District 134  
4148 Bellaire Blvd  
Houston, TX 77025

The Honorable Roland Gutierrez  
Texas State Representative, District 119  
510, 3319 Sidney Brooks #2  
San Antonio, TX 78235

The Honorable Richard Peña Raymond  
Texas State Representative, District 42  
1110 Houston St  
Laredo, TX 78040

The Honorable Roberto Alonzo  
Texas State Representative, District 104  
312 W. 12 Street, Suite A  
Dallas, TX 75208

The Honorable Kirk Watson  
Texas State Senate, District 14  
PO Box 12068  
Austin, TX 78711

The Honorable Eddie Rodriguez  
Texas State Representative, District 51  
PO Box 2910  
Austin, TX 78768

The Honorable James White  
Texas State Representative, District 19  
PO Box 395  
Woodville, TX 75979

The Honorable Ron Reynolds  
Texas State Representative, District 27  
2240 Texas Parkway, Suite 102  
Missouri City, TX 77489

The Honorable Senfronia Thompson  
Texas State Representative, District 141  
10527 Homestead Road  
Houston, TX 77016

The Honorable Celia Israel  
Texas State Representative, District 50  
PO Box 2910  
Austin, TX 78768

Luke Metzger  
Environment Texas  
815 Brazos, Suite 600  
Austin, TX 78701

Andrew Sansom  
The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment  
201 San Marcos Springs Drive,  
San Marcos, TX 78666

Orell Fitzsimmons  
United Labor Unions Local 100  
3333 Fannin #115  
Houston, TX 77004

Anne Olsen  
Buffalo Bayou Partnership  
1019 Commerce St, Suite 200  
Houston, TX 77002

Robin Schneider  
Texas Campaign for the Environment  
105 W Riverside Dr #120  
Austin, TX 78704

Annalisa Peace  
Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance  
1809 Blanco Rd  
San Antonio, TX 78212

David Baker  
Wimberley Valley Watershed Association  
P. O. Box 2534  
Wimberley, TX 78676

Steve Box  
Environmental Stewardship  
P.O. Box 1423  
Bastrop, TX 78602

Haily Summerford  
Trinity River Audubon Center  
6500 Great Trinity Forest Way  
Dallas, TX 75217

Bob Stokes  
Galveston Bay Foundation  
1100 Hercules Ave #200  
Houston, TX 77058

Deanna Butorac  
National Utility Contractor Association (NUCA) Texas  
PO Box 331694  
Fort Worth, TX 76163

Tom Smith  
Public Citizen’s Texas Office  
815 Brazos St., Suite 300  
Austin, TX 78701

Dr. John Jacob  
Galveston Baykeeper  
P.O. Box 71  
Seabrook, TX 77586

David Foster  
Clean Water Action  
600 W 28th St #202  
Austin, TX 78705

Elaine Wiant  
League of Women Voters of Texas  
1212 Guadalupe St. #107  
Austin, TX 78701

John Bartos & Helen Drummond  
Houston Audubon Society  
440 Wilchester Blvd  
Houston, TX 77079

Tim Mock  
Houston Climate Protection Alliance  
3211 Elmridge St.  
Houston, TX 77025

Ilan Levin  
Environmental Integrity Project  
707 Rio Grande, Suite 200  
Austin, TX 78701

Jan Miller  
Arlington Conservation Council  
P. O. Box 216,  
Arlington, TX 76004
Krystal Henagan
Moms Clean Air Force, Texas Chapter
Helotes, TX 78023

David Atwood
Pax Christi Houston
12831 Raven S Dr,
Cypress, TX 77429

Tricia Cortez
Rio Grande International Studies Center
1 West End Washington St
Laredo, TX 78040

Joe Marcinkowski
Houston Peace and Justice Center
P.O. Box 66234
Houston, TX 77266-6234

Dianne Wassenich
San Marcos River Foundation
222 W. San Antonio St
San Marcos, TX 78666