

Ensuring Southern Communities Benefit from Federal Water Infrastructure Funding

Clean water is a basic human need, but families in the South often lack access to clean water because of extremely old, damaged, or non-existent water infrastructure. Thanks to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, significant federal funding is available to help. Yet, many states are not utilizing funds. We need Congress to ensure Southern states take advantage of available State Revolving Fund dollars to remove lead service lines, treat PFAS contaminations, and invest in green infrastructure in our communities.

Bayou City Waterkeeper & The Water Collaborative Policy Priorities:

Communities in the South—whether urban or rural, coastal or inland—have dire water infrastructure needs. Because of aging infrastructure and centuries of wetlands destruction, our communities are more vulnerable to storm surges and coastal floods which overflow sewer and drainage systems and inundate both homes and businesses. These communities are also vulnerable to drinking water contaminants like lead and PFAS. These vulnerabilities disproportionately impact lower-income and BIPOC neighborhoods.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in 2021 provided \$55 billion, mostly through EPA’s Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds, to help remedy these problems. However, those funds can be complicated to utilize. In our advocacy in Southern communities, time and time again we are finding that state agencies are **1) not always aware of the wide variety of ways that SRF money can be used to help communities, and 2) often leaving available funding unused, despite significant water infrastructure needs across the South.**

“According to data from the US EPA and the American Society of Civil Engineers, Southern states represent the biggest share—\$41.8B per year—of water infrastructure investment needs in the Nation, making up 34% of the country’s total need.”

Rather than fully take advantage of these time-limited federal funds, many states and localities are content to do nothing or worse, raise rates on customers who already have disproportionately high water bills. **We need your office’s help to ensure our Southern agencies, municipalities, and local officials take advantage of available federal funds to help out families across the South.**

Recommendations

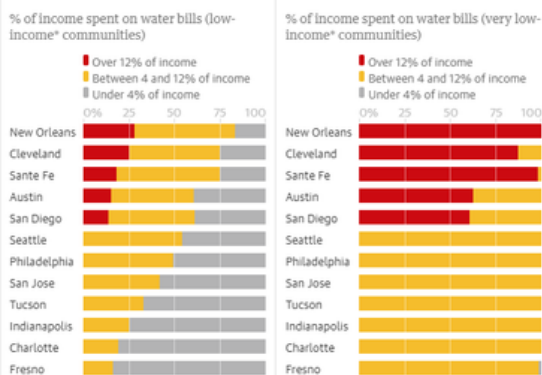
We urge federal leaders to:

- 1. Ensure state agencies administering SRF funds do appropriate, active outreach to communities to ensure that states do not leave unspent funds.** If communities and water systems do not know about these funds or what they can be used for (e.g., lead service line inventories, community outreach, technical assistance), they will not take advantage of these funds. Advocates need federal leaders to weigh in with states and ensure this rare opportunity is not wasted and benefits communities which are in dire need of infrastructure funding.
- 2. Ensure water utilities apply for these funds.** Utilities are not always aware of the available funds and set-asides, and a combination of education and incentivization can help ensure they do not overlook newly available, sorely needed federal funds.
- 3. Encourage communities to access free EPA Technical Assistance (TA) to help overcome barriers to applying for these funds.** The TA program authorized under BIL is a tremendous step. We must ensure this resource is utilized through increased community and utility outreach.

Floodwaters and Untapped Infrastructure Funds in Louisiana

New Orleans has long-standing issues with aging and failing water infrastructure and is prone to climate disasters such as hurricanes, tropical storms, flash floods, and saltwater intrusion. These disasters are a source of trauma and financial burden for residents across the city. Over 78% of low-income households in New Orleans cannot afford their water bills. Now, Louisiana officials want to increase rates on customers—which have already increased nearly 200% in the last decade—to help pay for infrastructure needs, rather than leveraging federal and state funding. The state and utility have yet to utilize lead service line funding under the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund program.

The cost of running water and sewer sewage is a burden for large numbers of poor Americans



Guardian graphic | Source: Roger Colton as part of an internal Guardian investigation. *Low-income = living below 200% of the FPL; Very low-income: below 50% of the FPL



About The Water Collaborative

The [Water Collaborative of Greater New Orleans](#) is a nonprofit dedicated to ensuring everyone can live, and thrive with water. The organization helps bridge the gap between federal, state, and local policy and how policies are implemented in communities. This includes advocacy for the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program and water affordability, analysis of Louisiana's SRF programs, water quality testing, lead service line abatement, and stormwater management initiatives. For more information, contact: **Rebecca Malpass**, Director of Policy & Research, rebecca@nolawater.org, 281-635-5740.

About Bayou City Waterkeeper

[Bayou City Waterkeeper](#) protects the waters and people of the Houston region through bold legal action, science, and community engagement. BCWK's current policy priorities are SRF advocacy in Texas focused on greener and more equitable implementation, wetland and flood protection, and clean water through sewage advocacy. For more information, contact: **Ayanna Jolivet Mccloud**, Executive Director, ayanna@bayoucitywaterkeeper.org, 832-713-3727.

About the WECR Caucus

The Water Collaborative and Bayou City Waterkeeper are core members of the [Water Equity & Climate Resilience \(WECR\) Caucus](#). Anchored by PolicyLink, the WECR Caucus is a national network of nearly 70 organizations centering frontline communities of color and low-income communities in working to achieve water equity and climate justice through federal and state policy advocacy, centering the voices and solutions of communities most affected by water challenges and the climate crisis. For more information, contact: **Yasmin Zaerpoor**, Director of Water Equity & Climate Resilience, PolicyLink, yasmin@policylink.org.