

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE Member Day Hearing

Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves, thank you for allowing me to share my priorities with you this morning.

First, I ask that the Committee approve a strong pipeline safety bill before the current law expires this year.

Some of you may remember that I testified before the Pipeline Subcommittee a month ago on this very issue.

I have no higher priority than to ensure that the residents of my District and your Districts are safe from the kind of preventable disaster that struck the Merrimack Valley last September.

It destroyed homes, shuttered businesses, injured first responders and residents, and took a young life.

On April 9th, I introduced the *Leonel Rondon Pipeline Safety Act*.

This bill, which was developed in close partnership with Senators Markey and Warren as well as Representatives Moulton and Kennedy, includes a series of recommendations drawn from the National Transportation Safety Board's interim report, issued last November.

It's been referred to this Committee as well as the Committee on Energy and Commerce, which, I understand, is holding a hearing on pipeline safety at this very moment.

I ask you to give full consideration to H.R. 2-1-3-9 so that this type of disaster never happens to a community again.

Second, I ask the Committee to ensure that wastewater infrastructure is a pillar of any infrastructure package that you develop.

On Monday morning, I convened a Merrimack River stakeholders meeting at the wastewater treatment plant in my hometown of Lowell.

Among the key messages that I heard was the need for stable, reliable, and robust federal funding for wastewater improvements.

The Chairman's bill, the *Water Quality Protection and Job Creation Act*, is an excellent starting point for this part of the infrastructure package.

I strongly support it.

This week, I will be introducing the *Stop Sewage Act*, which would refine the Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grants program, which was authorized last fall as part of the *America's Water Infrastructure Act*.

My bill has 4 components.

First, it increases the grant's authorization level to \$500 million annually.

According to the EPA's most recent "Clean Water Needs Survey," nearly \$50 billion is needed for combined sewer overflow correction.

Ever since the EPA's Construction grants program was eclipsed by the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, cities and towns have shouldered an ever-greater share of the burden of improving their wastewater infrastructure.

In Massachusetts, nearly \$1 billion is needed for improvements to combined sewer systems.

And it is estimated that there are more than 800 such communities across the nation, including in Oregon and Missouri.

The grant program's authorization level should be increased to more closely track with the degree of need across the nation.

Second, my bill would extend the program's authorization through 2030.

Communities with major wastewater infrastructure improvement needs deserve the assurance that the federal government intends to be a partner with them over the long term.

And thus, I encourage the Committee to approve a 10-year extension so that CSO communities can be certain of our commitment to them.

Third, it adds a new prioritization criterion that grant support should be targeted to communities with high levels of sewage in their rivers.

Last year, 800 million gallons of raw sewage and stormwater entered the Merrimack River – which is a drinking water supply for hundreds of thousands of people and a regional recreational asset.

State Revolving Funds have been useful to communities since the construction grants went away.

However, underserved communities with major CSO challenges need grant support, not just loans.

Finally, my bill would reduce the local cost-share requirement for a grant. It would be based upon a community's ability to pay for sewer system improvements.

In Lowell, ratepayers spend approximately \$550 annually on sewer service.

The 20th percentile of annual household income in the city is \$16,000.

These households are paying approximately 3.5% of their annual income for sewer service.

The local cost share requirement should correspond to the percentage of household income these families are already paying for sewer service.

It is our responsibility to provide our communities with clean water and ensure their safety and peace with accountability.

Again, I hope that the Committee will give full consideration to the *Leonel Rondon Pipeline Safety Act* as well as the *Stop Sewage Act*.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.