

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE Member Day Hearing

Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves, thank you for allowing me to testify before you today.

Two years ago, I came before this committee to urge the advancement of two critical priorities for Massachusetts' Third Congressional District: Reauthorizing and strengthening the *Pipeline Safety Act*, and massively increasing the federal government's support for America's wastewater infrastructure needs – in particular, putting an end to combined sewer overflows.

As you know, on the first priority, due in large measure to the outstanding work of *this* committee as well as the Energy and Commerce Committee, the "PIPES Act" became law at the end of 2020.

This new law improves public safety and energy reliability in an environmentally sound manner.

I am particularly grateful that the package included legislation that Senator Markey, Congressman Moulton, and I introduced – the *Leonel Rondon Pipeline Safety Act*.

This specific measure, which was named in honor of a young victim of the gas explosions that struck the Merrimack Valley on September 13th, 2018, is designed to prevent the types of catastrophic failures that took Leonel's life, injured many others, and destroyed property in the city of Lawrence and towns of Andover and North Andover.

This committee's work, I have no doubt, will save lives and property; and it will restore peace of mind to the communities I'm honored to represent.

Now that this bill has become law, I ask that you ensure the various rulemakings are rolled out on-time and consistent with Congressional intent.

In particular, section 206 includes a requirement that qualified employees be present on-site at gas distribution system pipeline projects to prevent overpressurization.

In the Merrimack Valley case, a remote system in Ohio **detected** the overpressurization – but could not **control** the gas flow. Had this provision already been in the law, this disaster may have been avoided.

The PIPES Act requires a new regulation on this provision within 180 days of enactment.

As of today, we are 109 days from enactment. Please be sure that deadlines like this one are not allowed to slip.

With respect to the second matter – wastewater infrastructure – the committee’s *Moving Forward Act* marked tremendous progress in restoring the federal government’s role in protecting our waterways.

As members of this committee know, Congress has long extended aid to help our cities and towns comply with the Clean Water Act. However, for much of the last 30 years, this aid has largely come in the form of loans – specifically, the State Revolving Funds.

While these loans are crucial, the cities and towns that I represent are in need of grants as well. Indeed, one of the recurring requests for “community project funding” that I have received from mayors and town managers is grant assistance for water and wastewater projects.

The need for these funds to upgrade wastewater systems cannot be overstated. Combined sewer systems – outmoded technology from the 19th century – routinely convey, **by design**, millions of gallons of untreated sewage directly into nearby bodies of water.

Representatives Pappas, Kuster, Moulton and I are particularly concerned by the recurring discharge of C-S-Os into the Merrimack River, a drinking water source for over half a million people. This is a problem that can only be solved by increased federal investment.

I was pleased that the *Moving Forward Act* included a 77 percent increase in the authorized funding level for the sewer overflow control grants program -- \$2 billion over five years.

And over the last two years, Congress has begun providing real dollars for the new sewer control grants program. Indeed, the EPA announced funding allocations earlier this month. While we’re not yet hitting the fully authorized level, we’re at last pointed in the right direction.

I’m especially appreciative of the fact that the committee adopted a provision inspired by the *Stop Sewage Overflow Act* – a bill that Representative LaHood and I have filed. The provision reduces the C-S-O grant program’s non-federal cost-share requirement for economically-disadvantaged areas.

Households struggling to make ends meet simply do not have the space in their budgets to continually pay more and more in rising sewer rates. This provision will offer some much-needed relief.

As this committee advances infrastructure legislation, I would ask that you include the highest funding level possible for the C-S-O grants program and continue to prioritize easing the burden on economically-disadvantaged communities in need of this aid.

Thank you, and I yield back.