

## **Remarks at the Water Resources Development Act of 2020 Members' Day Hearing**

**Congressman Peter J. Visclosky (IN-01): February 27, 2020**

I would like to first thank Full Committee Chair Peter DeFazio and Ranking Member Sam Graves, Subcommittee Chair Grace Napolitano and Ranking Member Bruce Westerman, and all of the members of the House Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment for holding today's hearing and providing this opportunity for myself and all Members to advocate for our priorities for the Water Resources Development Act of 2020 (WRDA 2020).

While I intend to submit a number of proposals to the Subcommittee for the upcoming WRDA, my reason for submitting this testimony is to discuss the vital importance of preserving and promoting Section 219 Environmental Infrastructure authority and related projects. As you know, Section 219 of WRDA 1992 authorizes the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to assist non-federal sponsors at a 75/25 percent cost share in the planning, design, and construction of municipal drinking water and wastewater infrastructure projects. Since Fiscal Year 2014, the Corps has funded Section 219 projects across 27 states, including Calumet Region projects in Indiana's First Congressional District. This Section 219 authority has been integral to the efforts of numerous communities in my district as they have sought to improve their quality of place, safeguard the public health of their citizens, and sustainably utilize their water resources.

One such municipality is my home, the City of Gary, which has experienced serious economic difficulties. Nevertheless, Gary has been working successfully with the State of Indiana and federal partners to ensure that the city's best days are indeed still ahead of it, not behind. An essential partner in particular is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which due to a mandate from Congress in annual appropriations measures, has continued to prioritize Section 219 projects that, among other things, seek to revitalize and invest in communities with high poverty or current financial distress.

For example, in April 2018, the Corps and the City of Gary, Indiana, completed a substantive forcemain replacement project. The project included the construction of a brand new 24-inch steel sanitary sewer forcemain, leading to improved sanitary sewer system flow and a reduction in pipe breaks and system shutdowns across the city.

Additionally, in September 2019, the Corps worked with the City of Gary to complete a significant sewer infrastructure project, which included the rehabilitation of approximately 4,000 linear feet of combined sewers and 21 existing manholes. Further, the project supported the installation of 600 feet of new sanitary sewer, 813 linear feet of percolation type storm sewers, and over 2,300 feet of new storm sewer. Due to these tremendous investments, the City of Gary is more fully prepared for flooding events and the stresses placed on municipal infrastructure.

Most recently, in December 2019, the Corps completed another major sewer improvement project in Gary, resulting in the restoration of over 16,600 feet of sewer lines in the city's Ambridge neighborhood. This successful effort will result in a reduction in sewer overflows and basement backups, and ultimately will lead to long-term savings to the city and residents on public infrastructure and private property repair costs, respectively.

In the over 20 years since my district has been authorized to receive environmental infrastructure assistance through the Corps, Section 219 authorized projects have continued to make a substantial, positive difference in Gary and a number of other local communities in my district. Therefore, as both the Full Committee and the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment work to develop proposals for WRDA 2020, I would implore you to maintain the long-term viability of current Section 219 authority, including by considering allowing Members to submit proposals to increase total project authorization levels for Section 219 accounts. For reference, without such an increase, the current funding pace for local Section 219 projects suggests that total authorization for these efforts in Gary and the rest of my district could run out within approximately eight years.

In conclusion, thank you Chair DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, Chair Napolitano, Ranking Member Westerman, and members of the Subcommittee for allowing me to the opportunity to discuss this important topic. I believe Section 219 authority remains an indispensable tool to distressed, recovering, and growing municipalities as they seek to invest in local infrastructure, and maintaining and strengthening this authority deserves strong consideration as Congress moves forward with WRDA 2020. I remain wholly available to you all as a colleague and partner in this regard.