

**MASSACHUSETTS WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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The cost of clean water

Many of you have heard about the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) signed in 2021. After much negotiation in Congress, the bill authorizes significant funding in areas such as roads, transit, and finally – after decades of little to no Federal investment – drinking water and wastewater projects. Almost \$1.2 billion will be coming to Massachusetts for water-related projects alone.

Great news, right? Indeed, this historic influx of Federal funding is certainly something to celebrate. But even though we all rely on clean, safe water to live every day, the irony is that water infrastructure is still relegated as a local issue without nearly the Federal support it deserves. It's for this reason that West Bridgewater Water Dept needs the support of our community now more than ever. And even then, the reality remains that your rates are still likely to rise.

Most people might not be aware that a key component of this new BIL funding for water projects is that it will be distributed through a competitive loan program. Per directives from Congress, the Commonwealth will use BIL funding to award attractive low-interest loans with some possibility of grants and principal forgiveness. Any local water project must first score high enough in a competitive process to even be eligible for a loan. Those projects that are deemed eligible then must demonstrate that they have local support to apply. So supporting The West Bridgewater Water Dept when water projects come before West Bridgewater Town Meeting, is paramount to take advantage of this historic funding.

But residents should be aware that this is not all “free” money. Grants and loan forgiveness are going to be largely targeted toward assisting disadvantaged communities. Much of the loans will need to be paid back. And with current supply chain issues, inflation, and the compressed timeframe in which these funds need to be spent, project costs may escalate during the time from bid to construction. Residents should be aware of these facts now, so they won't be surprised if The West Bridgewater Water Dept raises them while important water projects are discussed.

What cannot be disputed is the critical importance of investing in water projects. The last large infusion of Federal investment in water infrastructure was in the 1970s, and for many communities, the list of deferred maintenance and necessary upgrades to meet modern standards has become unavoidable.

Two studies conclude Massachusetts has underinvested in water infrastructure for too long. One study, conducted by the Massachusetts Water Infrastructure Finance Commission in 2012, documented an estimated \$21.4 billion gap between available funding and what was needed over 20 years for water and wastewater infrastructure. The other study was completed in 2018 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and it documented \$12.2 billion dollars in need over the next 20 years for just drinking water investment in the state. While the BIL is a welcome start, there is a long way to go.

With 21st century mandates such as replacing lead service lines or addressing PFAS, upgrading Treatment, installing Treatment, communities in Massachusetts can no longer wait to re-invest in their most vital resource, their water. While it will come at a cost, since the BIL funding will be distributed through a loan program, residents should vote to support The West Bridge Water Water Dept's efforts to advance water infrastructure projects in the community, and help elevate "local" water issues to higher state and national priorities.

Jennifer Pederson, Executive Director, Massachusetts Water Works Association
Wayne Parks, Superintendent West Bridgewater Water

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Massachusetts Water Works Association (MWWA) is a membership organization dedicated to the advancement of the drinking water profession. Through education and advocacy, MWWA is committed to protecting public health and promoting a safe and sufficient supply of drinking water to Massachusetts consumers.

West Bridgewater Water is your local water utility providing essential Water service to 2,654 customers in West Bridgewater