

WTR-1 Resolution Calling for Permanent Annual Federal Funding for a Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program

Whereas the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, which became law on December 27, 2020, provided \$638 million to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (“HHS”), Office of Community Services (“OCS”) and Administration for Children and Families (“ACS”) for grants to carry out a Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (“LIHWAP”) in response to the coronavirus pandemic;

Whereas on March 11, 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act appropriated an additional \$500 million in emergency spending for LIHWAP bringing the total funding for the program to \$1.138 billion;

Whereas LIHWAP is an emergency program to assist low-income households with their water and wastewater bills. The priority for LIHWAP is to ensure that households whose services have been disconnected due to non-payment, or are about to be disconnected, are able to have their services restored as quickly as possible;

Whereas these grants issued through LIHWAP provide funds to owners or operators of public water systems or treatment works to reduce arrearages and rates of low-income households. For the purposes of LIHWAP, “owners and operators of public water systems” are utilities that provide water for human consumption through pipes or other constructed conveyances, and include the water utilities regulated by the state public utility commissions that comprise the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (“NARUC”);

Whereas parties eligible to apply for LIHWAP grants are the states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, U.S. territories, federally and state-recognized Indian tribes, and tribal organizations that received similar utility assistance grants in fiscal year 2021;

Whereas establishing a new federal assistance program was a complex process at the federal, state, territory, tribal and local level. It required an extensive amount of effort by OCS, states and utilities to get the program up and running, ensure customers were aware of the program, and to distribute funds to those eligible;

Whereas data from the LIHWAP 3rd Quarter Report indicates that during the first three quarters of Fiscal Year 2022 (October 2, 2021 – June 30, 2022) 46 states and over 70 tribes have submitted LIHWAP applications; over 304,000 households received LIHWAP assistance and over 99,000 households had services restored or disconnection prevented through LIHWAP benefits assistance;

Whereas LIHWAP is a temporary emergency program that runs from January 4, 2022, until September 30, 2023, or when the program expends all of its funds;

Whereas the lack of permanent funding for a federal low-income water assistance program is troubling. Safe and reliable drinking water is essential for daily living, sanitation and a well-functioning economy;

Whereas the U.S. economy continues to falter with inflation and rising interest rates, which means the need to help customers pay their water bills continues to exist;

Whereas lack of running water makes a dwelling uninhabitable; *and*

Whereas should the LIHWAP program expire without establishing a permanent fund, water customers who have relied on LIHWAP to help pay their bills will suffer without this assistance; *now, therefore be it*

Resolved that the Board of Directors of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, convened at its 2022 Annual Meeting and Education Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, urges Congress to provide permanent annual funding for a federal Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program.

Sponsored by the Committee on Water

Adopted by the NARUC Board of Directors on November 15, 2022