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## Call for Congressional Commitment to Improve America's Wastewater Infrastructure

Columbus, OH - Welcome, and thank you all for coming here today as American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) releases a new report, "Water Works," which outlines the challenges and opportunities we face with our current wastewater infrastructure.

Each year 20 million Americans become sick from drinking contaminated water<sup>1</sup> and another 3.5 million Americans become sick from swimming in contaminated waters.

Although it's been more than 30 years since the Cuyahoga River was engulfed in flames and more than 40 years since the passage of the Clean Water Act, today over 10 billion gallons<sup>2</sup> of untreated sewage is dumped into Lake Erie and water resources across the state each year. Furthermore, over 41 billion gallons<sup>3</sup> of untreated sewage was dumped into the Great Lakes in 2009 from just five cities: Detroit, Cleveland, Buffalo, Milwaukee and Gary, Indiana. Ohio and the Great Lakes states are not alone in this problem. The report released today by AFSCME notes that 860 billion gallons of untreated sewage contaminates US waters<sup>1</sup> every single year.

These discharges have sizeable environmental, public health, recreational and economic impacts. Each year these discharges lead to health advisories, force beaches to close, harm wildlife, and impact tourism. These untreated discharges commonly contain bacteria, parasites, toxic chemicals and can contain more than 120 viruses. Additionally, in 2009, the US EPA reported that US Great Lakes beaches had 3,300 days of closings and advisories.

This environmental and public health blight is a direct result of our states old and failing wastewater infrastructure. As detailed by this report, our nation's water infrastructure is outdated, overextended and in crisis. And not only are we failing to make the investments to meet today's needs, we are also failing to make the investments needed to accommodate a growing population.

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<sup>1</sup> Green For All. "Water Works: Rebuilding Infrastructure, Creating Jobs, Greening the Environment." (2011). <http://greenforall.org.s3.amazonaws.com/pdf/Water-Works.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Environment America. "Sewage Overflow." (2007).  
<http://cdn.publicinterestnetwork.org/assets/E7Gu4-F8VzEy8QpeEHsVWQ/Ohio.Sewage-Overflow-Report.May2007.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition. "Turning the Tide: Investing in Wastewater Infrastructure to Create Jobs and Solve the Sewage Crisis in the Great Lakes." (2010).  
<http://www.healthylakes.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/08-02-2010HOWSewageReportFINAL.pdf>

In fact, in 2009, the American Society of Civil Engineers gave a D minus to both drinking and wastewater infrastructure, the lowest grade of any public infrastructure. Despite these alarming statistics, our investment in water infrastructure has fallen by one-third over the last 30 years. Unfortunately, most cities do not have the funding necessary to install new infrastructure and federal funding in water is at an all-time low.

Fortunately, there is a win-win-win solution to this problem – a significant investment and commitment to improving our country’s wastewater infrastructure both through traditional and green infrastructure. Such an investment would not only reduce the amount of sewage draining into our waterways, but would also be a strong economic driver creating between 72,000 and nearly 128,000 jobs in Ohio alone, according to the report released today. This is an excellent opportunity for us to create jobs, protect public health and protect the environment.

Given the significant investment needed we must use a strategic approach that both updates traditional sewer and wastewater infrastructure while increasing the use of green infrastructure. Green infrastructure is not only less costly, it also protects the environment, improves the visual aesthetics of communities and can increase land value. By utilizing green infrastructure, such as green roofs, urban tree planting, rain gardens, permeable pavements and constructed wetlands we can better manage storm water and return more of it to our groundwater before it ever reaches our wastewater pipes.

Solving this ever growing problem requires a national approach and demands investment at the federal level as local budgets are inadequate to meet the enormous costs of infrastructure updates.

So today we urge Congress to make this investment and make this commitment.

The American Jobs Act would be a start at tackling the infrastructure investment gap. We call on all members of Congress to support the American Jobs Act so that we can put people to work and make our communities and our people healthier and safer.

We also urge Congress to increase funding of the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund (CWSRF), which will assist states, counties, and cities in creating a 21<sup>st</sup> century infrastructure which must include green along with traditional infrastructure. Furthermore, we call on Congress to set aside 20% of the CWSRF funding for green infrastructure projects given the sizable benefits that these projects provide.

Additionally, we urge Congress to live up to the promise of the Great Lake Restoration Initiative (GLRI) and fund it accordingly. This year, the President’s budget requested \$350 million dollars in appropriations for the Great GLRI. In its budget proceedings the US House of Representatives appropriated \$300 million to GLRI thanks to Representative LaTourette. We hope that the Senate, with support from Senators Brown and Portman, would at a minimum appropriate \$300 million.

Water is essential to our way of life. From the water we drink to the water we use to grow our food to the water we use in nearly everything we produce and consume. Water is essential.

Now is the time to act. We should not let this opportunity pass. This is a win-win-win solution that will drive economic development putting thousands of people back to work in Ohio, protecting our

\$10 billion dollar tourism industry at Lake Erie, ensuring safe drinking water, and protecting the public from a slew of harmful health effects. Now is the time to act.

Thank you.

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