

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

### COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-3641

Minority (202) 225-2927

February 20, 2026

Mr. David Gadis  
Chief Executive Officer and General Manager  
DC Water  
1385 Canal Street, SE  
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Mr. Gadis:

Pursuant to Rules X and XI of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Committee on Energy and Commerce (Committee) is examining the incident involving the rupture of DC Water's Potomac Interceptor sewage line. The Committee has concerns about how this incident will impact public health, safe drinking water, the environment, interstate commerce, and tourism, all of which fall within the Committee's jurisdiction. DC Water is responsible for delivering drinking water and wastewater services to communities in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia (DC), as well as the federal government, including operation and maintenance of the 54-mile-long Potomac Interceptor line. The Committee is requesting documents and information from DC Water about what is already being referred to as "one of the largest sewage spills in U.S. history."<sup>1</sup>

It is our understanding that an underground section of the Potomac Interceptor (PI) sewer line, which carries roughly 60 million gallons of wastewater per day, "collapsed" on January 19, 2026, along the Clara Barton Parkway and caused a release of untreated sewage within the C&O Canal National Historic Park in Montgomery County, Maryland, and into the Potomac River.<sup>2</sup> The cause of the rupture is still being investigated, but a review of public records indicates DC Water knew that the Potomac Interceptor was at risk of failure and in need of emergency repairs.<sup>3</sup> On May 1, 2025, the Board of Directors for the D.C. Water and Sewer Authority unanimously approved the execution of an emergency contract to provide "program management, preconstruction and emergency construction services for the rehabilitation and

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<sup>1</sup> *UMD team finds E. coli, MRSA in Potomac River after sewage spill*, SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH (Feb. 05, 2026), <https://sph.umd.edu/news/umd-team-finds-e-coli-mrsa-potomac-river-after-sewage-spill>.

<sup>2</sup> *Potomac Interceptor Collapse*, DC WATER, <https://www.dewater.com/about-dc-water/media/potomac-interceptor-collapse> (last visited Feb. 20, 2026).

<sup>3</sup> D.C. Water and Sewer Authority Board of Directors, Environmental Quality and Operations Committee, Apr. 17, 2025 Meeting Package, [https://www.dewater.com/sites/default/files/event/2025-01/documents/Environmental%20Quality%20and%20Operations%20Committee%20Meeting%20Package%20-%2004.17.25\\_0.pdf](https://www.dewater.com/sites/default/files/event/2025-01/documents/Environmental%20Quality%20and%20Operations%20Committee%20Meeting%20Package%20-%2004.17.25_0.pdf).

redundancy of the Potomac Interceptor.”<sup>4</sup> The value of the contract was for more than \$44.7 million.<sup>5</sup> It is unclear what steps, if any, were taken by DC Water to execute the emergency repair contract and if the collapse could have been avoided.

The collapse resulted in over 240 million gallons of raw sewage flowing into the Potomac River with potentially devastating impacts.<sup>6</sup> Drinking water to the national capital region is sourced from several locations along the Potomac River via the Washington Aqueduct and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and delivered by DC Water to more than 700,000 residents and 27 million annual visitors.<sup>7</sup> Since the incident, the drinking water intakes at Little Falls have been closed.<sup>8</sup>

Since the initial spill, efforts have been underway to reroute wastewater from the site of the initial spill back into the sewer system.<sup>9</sup> However, cleanup of the affected sites will be an ongoing effort, and collaboration between relevant entities at the federal, state, and local levels will be critical to ensure minimal impacts to public and environmental health. On Wednesday, February 18, 2026, Washington, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bower officially declared this incident to be a local public emergency and requested federal intervention to assist with damage mitigation.<sup>10</sup>

The impact of the spill is already widespread and has created potentially long-lasting public health risks. Tests by DC Water indicate that E. Coli bacteria levels in the Potomac River were as high as 570,000 MPN/100mL in the days immediately after the incident.<sup>11</sup> The U.S. EPA recommends not swimming in water where E. Coli levels exceed 410 MPN/100mL.<sup>12</sup> Researchers at the University of Maryland also found extremely high levels of fecal-related bacteria and disease-causing pathogens in the Potomac River following the sewage spill. According to Dr. Rachel Rosenberg Goldstein, microbiologist and assistant professor at the University of Maryland’s Department of Global, Environmental, and Occupational Health, “[p]eople coming into contact with the impacted water or land are at risk of becoming infected with these bacteria, which can lead to serious health conditions.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, making matters

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<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Gary Grumbach, *A month after the pipe burst, Potomac sewage spills onto the national stage with political finger-pointing*, NBC NEWS (Feb. 19, 2026), <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/potomac-sewage-spills-national-stage-political-finger-pointing-rcna259770>.

<sup>7</sup> *DC Water At A Glance*, DC Water, <https://www.dewater.com/about-dc-water/who-we-are/dc-water-glance> (last visited Feb. 20, 2026).

<sup>8</sup> *Potomac Interceptor Collapse*, DC WATER, <https://www.dewater.com/about-dc-water/media/potomac-interceptor-collapse> (last visited Feb. 20, 2026).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> Max Rego, *DC mayor declares Potomac spill emergency, asks Trump for help*, THE HILL (Feb. 19, 2026), <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/5744883-muriel-bowser-dc-emergency-potomac-river-sewage/>.

<sup>11</sup> *Potomac Interceptor Collapse*, DC WATER, <https://www.dewater.com/about-dc-water/media/potomac-interceptor-collapse> (last visited Feb. 20, 2026).

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *Factsheet on Water Quality Parameters, E. coli (Escherichia coli)*, [https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2021-07/parameter-factsheet\\_e.-coli.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2021-07/parameter-factsheet_e.-coli.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> *UMD team finds E. coli, MRSA in Potomac River after sewage spill*, SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH (Feb. 5, 2026), <https://sph.umd.edu/news/umd-team-finds-e-coli-mrsa-potomac-river-after-sewage-spill>.

even worse, these bacteria “can survive in freezing temperatures and become active again when temperatures rise.”<sup>14</sup>

Public health warnings have been given for people and pets to avoid contact with water from the Potomac River and to avoid fishing, rowing, and other activities in the area.<sup>15</sup> The warnings to avoid the contaminated water come shortly before the annual Cherry Blossom Festival, which is centered around the Tidal Basin along the Potomac River, and the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, both of which are expected to attract millions of visitors to the District of Columbia.

An incident of this size and scale presents a significant threat to the public health and welfare of the affected communities, and swift mitigation of these risks is critical. Understanding the nature of how this incident occurred and how future incidents of this scale may be prevented in the future is imperative.

To better understand the nature of this incident and to assist the Committee in its oversight, we request the following documents and information from January 1, 2024, to present by no later than March 6, 2026:

1. How long has DC Water been aware of the risks of a potential collapse or rupture to the Potomac Interceptor sewer tunnel?
  - a. Provide all documents and communication regarding DC Water’s identification of the risks of a collapse or rupture to the Potomac Interceptor sewer tunnel.
2. Has DC Water conducted any audits, inspections, or analysis to assess the condition of the Potomac Interceptor?
  - a. If so, please provide all documents and communications regarding any audits, inspections, or analysis of potential risks of a collapse or rupture of the Potomac Interceptor sewer tunnel.
3. Please provide all contracts and agreements between DC Water and contractors or potential contractors regarding emergency repairs to the Potomac Interceptor sewer tunnel. This should include any documents concerning why emergency contracting was warranted and why any approved contracts were not implemented.
  - a. If any contracts regarding repairs to the Potomac Interceptor sewer tunnel were negotiated and approved by DC Water Board but not implemented,

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<sup>14</sup> *UMD team finds E. coli, MRSA in Potomac River after sewage spill*, SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH (Feb. 5, 2026), <https://sph.umd.edu/news/umd-team-finds-e-coli-mrsa-potomac-river-after-sewage-spill>.

<sup>15</sup> *See, e.g., Potomac Interceptor Update and FAQs*, The District of Columbia’s Dept. of Energy and Env., <https://doee.dc.gov/node/1817721> (last updated Feb. 18, 2026); *Sewage Spill in the Potomac River*, Virginia Dept. of Health, <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/news/potomac-sewage-spill/> (last updated Feb. 19, 2026).

please provide all documents and communications regarding the delay in implementation of those contracts.

4. What actions has DC Water taken to date to respond to the release of sewage from the Potomac Interceptor to the Potomac River and to remediate any environmental impacts?
  - a. What further actions will DC Water take to clean up the Potomac River sewage spill?
  - b. What is the timeline to finish emergency repairs to the Potomac Interceptor and the cleanup of the related Potomac River sewage spill?
  - c. Please provide copies of all communications between DC Water and the Office of the Mayor for the District of Columbia, the Maryland Department of the Environment, the Office of the Governor for the State of Maryland, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regarding the release of sewage from the Potomac Interceptor and related cleanup of the Potomac River sewage spill.
5. What mitigation actions has DC Water taken, if any, to ensure a sewage spill such as this will not happen again?
  - a. Has DC Water created a long-term maintenance plan to prevent Potomac River sewage spill happening again? If so, please provide a copy of the long-term maintenance plan.
6. What steps did DC Water take to inform the Army Corps of Engineers and downstream communities to close access to any drinking water intakes along the Potomac River in response to the Potomac Interceptor collapse?
  - a. Please provide copies of all communications between DC Water and the Army Corps of Engineers regarding the closure of drinking water intakes in response to the Potomac Interceptor collapse.
7. Has DC Water done any evaluations, analysis, or assessments to determine how this incident will impact public health? If so, please provide all documents and communications related to these evaluations, analysis, or assessments.
8. Has DC Water done any evaluations, analysis, or assessments to determine how this incident will impact drinking water or air quality? If so, please provide all documents and communications related to these evaluations, analysis, or assessments.
9. Has DC Water done any evaluations, analysis, or assessments to determine how this incident will impact tourism? If so, please provide all documents and communications related to these evaluations, analysis, or assessments.

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We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Committee Majority Staff at (202) 225-3641.

Sincerely,



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Brett Guthrie  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce



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John Joyce, M.D.  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations



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Gary Palmer  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Environment

cc: The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr., Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and  
Commerce  
The Honorable Yvette D. Clarke, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations  
The Honorable Paul D. Tonko, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Environment