Testimony of

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On Behalf of the

Alabama Rural Water Association

and the

National Rural Water Association

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Subject

"From Source to Tap: A Hearing to Examine Challenges and Opportunities for Safe, Reliable, and Affordable Drinking Water"

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Summary of Major Points

Eric Hill is General Manager of the Russellville Water & Sewer Board in Russellville, Alabama, with more than 30 years of experience in water and wastewater operations. He is testifying on behalf of the National Rural Water Association (NRWA) and the Alabama Rural Water Association (ARWA), and serves on the NRWA Board of Directors, as Chairman of NRWA's Regulatory Committee, as Vice President of the ARWA Board, and on the American Water Works Association (AWWA) Water Utility Council.

Small and rural systems comprise 91 percent of the nation's approximately 50,000 community drinking water systems yet face the same federal mandates as the largest metropolitan utilities. In Russellville, 26 employees manage both a drinking water plant and a wastewater treatment facility with no in-house engineering, legal, or dedicated compliance staff.

The State Revolving Fund is one of the most important water infrastructure tools available to small communities. Russellville is managing approximately $2 million in active SRF projects: $1 million Drinking Water SRF and $1 million Clean Water SRF. These funds supported SCADA replacement, water main repair, a booster station upgrade serving half the water Russellville sells, and a wastewater treatment improvement that restored 7.5 million gallons per day of capacity after nearly 30 years without a major upgrade. However, implementation barriers (application complexity, Davis-Bacon/BABA compliance costs, contractor shortages, and scoring systems favoring scale) continue to curtail SRF funds from reaching the communities that need them most.

The water sector faces a workforce crisis, with up to half of operators expected to leave within ten years. To date, the NRWA Registered Apprenticeship Program has thirty-five State Rural Water Associations offering federally approved Registered Apprenticeship Programs designed by industry leaders to attract, train and retain the next generation rural water workforce with over 1200 apprentices enrolled or graduated so far.

EPA's Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) technical assistance places trusted, professionals directly on-site with operators. This initiative remains the most cost-effective federal investment for small-system compliance. Recent EPA solicitations fragmenting TA funding among providers without rural water expertise risk undermining this 50-year model.

Water and wastewater systems are passive receivers of PFAS contamination, not polluters. The entire water sector supports H.R. 1267, the Water Systems PFAS Liability Protection Act, to provide a statutory exemption from CERCLA liability for water utilities.

Mr. Hill urges the Committee to strengthen SRF implementation with flexible principal forgiveness, extended timeframes, simplified reporting, and BABA/Davis-Bacon waivers for small projects; continue supporting the NRWA apprenticeship program; protect EPA SDWA technical assistance model from fragmentation; enact H.R. 1267; and prioritize affordability and feasibility given the cumulative regulatory burden on small systems.

Good morning, Chairman Guthrie, Chairman Palmer, Ranking Member Tonko, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the challenges and opportunities facing our nation's drinking water systems.

My name is Eric Hill, and I have had the privilege of serving the people of Russellville, Alabama as General Manager of the Russellville Water & Sewer Board since 2019. I have spent more than thirty years in the water and wastewater industry, beginning my career in 1993 as an operator for a small rural water system serving just over 2,000 customers. Over three decades, I have worked my way from entry-level operator to working foreman to the position I hold today. I now manage a drinking water filtration plant, a wastewater treatment facility, a well source, distribution and collection systems, and the pump stations, booster stations, and tanks that connect them all, with a staff of 26 dedicated employees.

I am here today on behalf of the National Rural Water Association (NRWA), the country's largest utility membership organization with over 31,000 members dedicated to drinking water quality, environmental protection, and public health. NRWA provides training, financial management, emergency response, environmental compliance, and on-site technical assistance to water and wastewater utilities in small and rural communities across all 50 states and Puerto Rico. I currently serve on the NRWA Board of Directors representing Alabama and as Chairman of NRWA's Regulatory Committee, where I actively research and comment on EPA rulemaking matters at the local, state, and federal level. I am also Vice President of the Alabama Rural Water Association (ARWA) Board of Directors and a member of the American Water Works Association (AWWA) Water Utility Council.

Chairman Palmer, I am particularly honored to testify before a fellow Alabamian who understands the communities I serve. And I want to applaud and thank this esteemed Committee

for leading the enactment of the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), both of which have a direct and measurable impact on towns like Russellville. I am here to tell you what that impact looks like from the ground in rural America.

I want to be direct about my perspective. I am not a policy analyst or an association executive. I am a working utility manager who holds dual water and wastewater operator certifications in Alabama. I test the water. I manage the treatment. I sign the compliance reports. And I see, every single day, what federal investments and federal requirements mean for a small community that is doing its best to deliver safe, reliable, affordable water to its citizens. That is the lens through which I will offer my testimony today.

The Reality of Small System Operations

Before I discuss specific policy issues, I want to paint a picture of what it means to operate a small rural water and wastewater utility in America today.

Nationally, approximately 91 percent of the roughly 50,000 community drinking water systems in the United States serve populations of 10,000 or fewer. About 80 percent of the country's more than 16,000 wastewater systems serve communities of similar size. In Alabama, ARWA provides services to 502 community water systems serving a combined population of over 5 million Alabamians, and the vast majority of those systems are small and rural.

These small systems face the same regulatory mandates as the largest metropolitan utilities in the country. We must comply with the same Safe Drinking Water Act rules, the same monitoring and reporting requirements, and the same enforcement consequences. But we do it with a fraction of the staff budget, and technical capacity. In Russellville, my 26 employees manage every aspect of both our drinking water and wastewater operations: treatment,

distribution, collection, maintenance, compliance, billing, and customer service. There is no in-house engineering department, no dedicated regulatory compliance officer, and no legal counsel on staff. When a water main breaks at 2:00 a.m., the same people who read your water meter that morning are the ones responding.

What makes Russellville's situation particularly illustrative is that we operate both a drinking water system and a wastewater system. That dual responsibility compounds every challenge. When a new EPA rule is enforced for drinking water, my staff must learn it, implement it, and document compliance, all while simultaneously keeping up with wastewater treatment requirements, collection system maintenance, and the growing list of obligations on both sides of the operation. It is not that any individual rule is unreasonable. It is that they stack on top of each other and land on the same 26 people.

This is the reality for thousands of small utilities across the country. We are not asking for less regulation. We are asking for the resources, flexibility, and support to comply effectively. That is what I would like to discuss today.

Water Infrastructure Investment and the State Revolving Fund

The Environmental Protection Agency's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund is one of the most effective tools Congress has ever created for public water infrastructure. And as a utility manager, I continue to benefit from this important infrastructure funding firsthand.

Today, I am managing approximately $2 million in active SRF-funded projects through the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM). The Drinking Water SRF loan is $1 million with a $138,000 local match, and the Clean Water SRF loan is $1 million with a $600,000 local match. These loans are allowing Russellville to tackle critical infrastructure

needs on both our drinking water and wastewater systems that we could not have addressed on our own. I want to walk the Committee through what these funds are actually doing for our community, because the specifics tell the story better than any statistic.

Drinking Water SRF: Modernizing a System from the Ground Up

On the drinking water side, our SRF funds have supported a series of projects that collectively represent the most significant modernization of Russellville's water system in a generation.

In 2024, we used SRF funds to completely replace an outdated proprietary telemetry system that had been in service for over 25 years. The new SCADA system includes redundant cellular carriers, firewall configurations, VPN access, multi-factor authentication, and modern security features. This was both an operational upgrade and a cybersecurity investment, and I will discuss the security dimension later in my testimony.

Also in 2024, a six-inch water main that runs through a creek bed had separated. We used SRF funds to replace the line with ductile iron pipe and field restraint gaskets, then embedded the new pipe in the creek bottom with additional control valves for isolation. Without SRF financing, that emergency repair would have strained our operating budget and potentially delayed other maintenance work.

In 2025, we completed a water filter plant waste pond remediation, clearing and cleaning two waste ponds that store and settle our filter waste material. This was essential maintenance that protects both our treatment capacity and our environmental compliance.

On March 11th of this year, we will open bids for what may be the most consequential drinking water project in this round: a complete upgrade of a booster station that pumps 50 percent of the water we sell. The upgrade includes variable frequency drives, larger pumps and

motors, and an ultrasonic flow meter. Critically, it will also give us the capability to take a two-million-gallon storage tank offline to meet the new ADEM regulation requiring five-year tank washouts beginning in 2027. Without this upgrade, meeting that regulation while maintaining affordable service would have been extremely difficult.

Our remaining drinking water projects include filter plant air-operated valve replacement, flocculator upgrades, and control room upgrades, all of which extend the life and improve the reliability of a treatment facility that serves our entire community.

What This Means for Small Systems

I described these SRF-funded projects in detail because I want this Committee to understand what $1 million in SRF funding buys for a small community. It is not a headline project. It is a comprehensive program of repairs, upgrades, and modernizations across the utility systems that collectively improve public health, environmental protection, system reliability, cybersecurity, regulatory compliance, and economic development capacity. Without the SRF's favorable loan terms and match requirements, most of these projects would still be sitting on a wish list.

Our experience in Russellville reflects a broader pattern. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) was a historic, bipartisan achievement, and NRWA and our state affiliates are extremely grateful for this Committee's leadership in realizing these investments for the water sector. The dedicated funding for lead service line replacement, emerging contaminants, disadvantaged community set-asides, and the expansion of the State Revolving Funds has been meaningful. However, we are hearing from systems across the country and across Alabama that the funds have been slow to reach the communities that need them most.

Implementation Barriers

Several persistent barriers are preventing small systems from fully benefiting from the IIJA's intended investment:

Application complexity remains a significant obstacle. For a system like ours with no in-house engineering or grant-writing staff, the paperwork required to access SRF funds can be daunting. Many small systems lack the administrative capacity to navigate multi-step application processes, environmental review requirements, and detailed reporting obligations. Technical assistance providers like ARWA and NRWA play a critical role in helping systems through this process, but the volume of applications and the complexity of the new IIJA funding categories has strained that capacity.

Federal compliance requirements, including Davis-Bacon prevailing wage provisions, Build America Buy America (BABA) requirements, and American Iron and Steel mandates, add cost and complexity that disproportionately affect small projects. For a $1 million project in Russellville, these compliance layers consume a share of the budget and staff time that a $200 million project in a major city can absorb far more easily. NRWA and our cross-sector partners, including the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators, have consistently called for targeted flexibility, such as BABA and Davis-Bacon waivers for small projects, to ensure that federal requirements do not inadvertently price small communities out of the very programs designed to help them.

Contractor and engineer shortages have driven up project costs and extended timelines. In Alabama, as in much of rural America, the pool of qualified contractors and engineers willing to take on small-scale water projects is limited. ADEM has done commendable work directing IIJA and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds toward rural and disadvantaged communities,

awarding 646 projects across all 67 Alabama counties through a needs-based process as of early 2024. But inflationary pressures and supply chain disruptions continue to challenge project delivery.

Scoring systems that favor scale over need remain a structural concern as well. As EPA has documented, approximately 72 percent of Clean Water SRF funding and 73 percent of Drinking Water SRF funding go to large systems. While those communities certainly have infrastructure needs, the current allocation patterns mean that many of the smallest and most vulnerable systems, those with the least capacity to self-finance, receive a disproportionately small share of available resources.

Alabama's Department of Environmental Management estimates that approximately $1.1 billion of the state's $3.3 billion estimated water infrastructure need has been funded, meaning roughly two-thirds of the need remains unaddressed. Nationally, EPA's Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey estimates a 20-year capital improvement need of $625 billion. These are not abstract numbers. They represent the pipes under our streets, the treatment systems that protect public health, and the tanks and pump stations that keep water flowing to homes, schools, and hospitals.

Recommendations

To maximize the impact of the IIJA and the State Revolving Funds for small and rural communities, I respectfully urge the Committee to consider the following: adopt flexible principal forgiveness thresholds that reflect the realities of small-system financing; extend project timeframes beyond five years to account for the complexity of infrastructure work in rural areas; simplify reporting requirements that create administrative burdens without

proportionate accountability gains; provide targeted BABA and Davis-Bacon flexibility for small projects; and address environmental review delays for projects on previously studied sites.

National Water and Wastewater Operator Apprenticeship Program

I am a product of the career pathway for which NRWA advocates. I started in this industry in 1993, working as a water and wastewater operator for a system serving just over 2,000 customers. I learned on the job, earned my certifications, advanced through the ranks, and eventually became General Manager. That career path, from operator to leader, is exactly what the water sector needs to replicate at scale, because we are facing a workforce crisis that threatens the sustainability of the most basic civic necessity our communities rely on.

Nationally, up to one-half of the water and wastewater workforce is expected to leave the industry within the next ten years through retirement, attrition, or career change. In many states, the average age of water operators is approaching 60. Small and rural systems are particularly vulnerable because they cannot compete with larger utilities or the private sector on salary, benefits, or career advancement opportunities. When an experienced operator retires from a system like ours, that person takes decades of institutional knowledge about the specific quirks of our infrastructure like which valves to turn first, which pumps run hot, or which lines are most vulnerable in a freeze. That knowledge is irreplaceable without a deliberate pipeline of trained successors.

The National Rural Water Association's Registered Apprenticeship Program, developed in partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor, is the most promising solution I have seen to this challenge. The program provides a structured two-year pathway combining 4,000 hours of on-the-job training with 288 hours of technical instruction, preparing apprentices for state

certification while earning a living wage. In 2024, EPA awarded NRWA a $5.59 million grant, funds authorized by this Committee, specifically to expand and improve this initiative. As of January 2026, 35 State Rural Water Associations have completed the rigorous process of obtaining federally approved Registered Apprenticeship Programs and are now attracting, training, and retaining the next generation water workforce, with over 687 apprentices enrolled and more than 519 who have completed their apprenticeship as of December 31, 2025.

Alabama has been part of this effort since 2020, when the Alabama Rural Water Association finalized its apprenticeship agreement with the Alabama Office of Apprenticeship. As of January 1, 2026, 15 Alabama employers were participating with 9 apprentices placed at 5 utilities. These are modest numbers, but they represent real progress in a state where recruiting young people into the water sector has historically been a challenge. We need to grow this pipeline, and continued federal support for the apprenticeship program is essential to making that happen.

As the General Manager of Russellville, I wholeheartedly support National and Alabama Rural Water's efforts because training someone on the job, with structured curriculum and clear milestones, produces operators who are better prepared than those who simply learn by trial and error. It also gives young people in rural communities a viable career path that does not require leaving home, and that matters in places like Russellville where keeping talent is as important as finding it.

I urge this Committee to continue supporting the NRWA Apprenticeship Program and workforce development funding within water infrastructure reauthorization legislation. The investment pays dividends not just in operator readiness, but in system reliability, public health protection, and the long-term sustainability of small water utilities.

The Value of Trusted Training and On-Site Technical Assistance

For nearly fifty years, the National Rural Water Association, the Alabama Rural Water Association, and our state affiliates have provided small, rural, tribal, and disadvantaged communities with hands-on training and on-site technical assistance. This is one of the most cost-effective federal investments for drinking water compliance Congress makes because it enhances operational capability for systems that lack staff, resources, and technical expertise. Safe Drinking Water Act technical assistance allows small communities to meet federal requirements and keeps water safe and affordable.

This is not a new concept. Congress has repeatedly recognized that small systems do not fail because they are unwilling to comply; they struggle because they lack technical, managerial, and financial capacity. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) reaffirmed this by including multiple technical assistance set-asides specifically designed to help communities that cannot realistically access State Revolving Fund financing on their own. Through trusted relationships and practical operational expertise, Rural Water has become the primary partner small and rural communities rely on to interpret EPA rules, prevent violations, access infrastructure funding, and safely operate drinking water and wastewater systems.

NRWA currently provides this assistance in all fifty states and Puerto Rico. In Alabama alone, ARWA serves 502 community water systems, approximately 93% of them members, through specialists who travel directly to utilities, meet with operators and managers, and solve problems in real time. These are not consultants issuing reports or hosting webinars from several states away. They are experienced operators and utility professionals who understand local source water, treatment processes, equipment limitations, and the financial realities of small systems.

The EPA Water Training and Technical Assistance Program exists to reduce non-compliance with health-based standards, and the most effective method has consistently been practical, in-person assistance. NRWA's partnership with EPA focuses on helping communities operate, govern, finance, upgrade, and maintain their infrastructure while keeping operators trained and certified. When local officials understand what the law actually requires, and how to meet it, compliance follows. It is also important to note that EPA's Safe Drinking Water Act technical assistance works because it is built on trust. When the same specialist visits a system regularly, they know the operator, understand the equipment and operating history, and can identify problems before they become violations. In communities like Russellville, that relationship has helped navigate the SRF financing, interpreting new regulations, and troubleshooting treatment challenges before they threatened compliance.

The value of this model becomes even clearer during emergencies. Last year, the Town of Hodges, AL, population roughly 2,400, suddenly lost its certified operator after the superintendent was seriously injured in a car accident. Overnight, no one remaining knew how to operate the water system. The city clerk contacted me because the town fell within the ARWA district I represent. Within one hour, an ARWA specialist was on-site. We coordinated with the state regulatory engineer, reviewed the permit and sampling requirements, and ARWA provided a temporary operator of record while helping manage the system until permanent coverage could be arranged. The community never lost service and never violated its permit. That outcome was only possible because a trusted, local, experienced technical assistance provider was already in place.

I do want to raise a concern relevant to the Committee's oversight. EPA recently issued roughly $79 million in technical-assistance solicitations fragmented among numerous providers,

many without direct operational experience serving rural utilities. NRWA supports expanding capacity, but technical assistance only works when the provider has field expertise, local presence, and established relationships. When unfamiliar entities are deployed into the same communities, utilities experience duplication, confusion, frustration, and delayed assistance - the opposite of what Congress intended.

Small and rural communities are not the problem; they are partners in protecting public health and the environment. These utilities are governed directly by local citizens and exist solely to serve those citizens. On-site technical assistance builds the technical, managerial, and financial capacity needed to address aging infrastructure, limited budgets, and workforce turnover, preventing violations, lowering costs, and protecting drinking water and groundwater quality.

Thanks to this Committee's foresight and leadership, Congress recognized this in 2015 when it unanimously enacted the Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems Assistance Act, directing EPA to provide on-site assistance in the manner most effective for small communities. By following that statute and prioritizing experienced providers, maintaining consistent nationwide coverage, and focusing resources on the systems that need assistance most, EPA can make SDWA technical assistance more efficient, accountable, and effective.

PFAS and CERCLA: Protecting the Passive Receiver

Chairman Palmer, I know this Subcommittee has been actively engaged on the issue of PFAS contamination and CERCLA liability, most notably through the hearing you chaired on December 18, 2025. I want to add the perspective of a small water system operator to that conversation.

Russellville has proactively tested our well source and our raw water intake at the lake for PFAS compounds, and I am pleased to report that we have had no detections. We are doing the right thing by testing voluntarily, and we will continue to do so. But the fact that we are testing at all illustrates a broader point: water and wastewater systems across the country are spending time and money to monitor for contamination that they did not create, did not manufacture, did not distribute, and did not profit from.

As a dual water and wastewater operator, I am acutely aware that the PFAS challenge extends beyond drinking water. The NRWA Regulatory Committee commented on the EPA's Sewage Sludge Risk Assessment in August 2025, and I am aware that the wastewater and biosolids side of PFAS is the next regulatory frontier. Small systems that manage both drinking water and wastewater, as Russellville does, face potential exposure on two fronts for contamination they had no role in creating.

NRWA's position on this issue is clear, and I share it fully: water and wastewater systems are passive receivers of PFAS contamination, not polluters. They did not manufacture PFAS. They did not introduce it into the environment or the water supply. Extending CERCLA liability to these systems, which are themselves victims of contamination, penalizes the communities that are trying to solve the problem rather than the entities that created it.

The Water Systems PFAS Liability Protection Act (H.R. 1267), introduced on February 12, 2025, by Representatives Maloy and Gluesenkamp Perez with bipartisan support, would provide the statutory protection that water systems need. This legislation is supported by the entire Water Coalition Against PFAS, including AMWA, AWWA, NACWA, NAWC, NRWA, and WEF, representing virtually the entire water sector. NRWA CEO Matthew Holmes is quoted in the joint coalition statement supporting this bill.

I respectfully urge this Committee and the full House to pass H.R. 1267 and ensure that water and wastewater systems are not held liable for contamination they did not cause. I ask that the "polluter pays" principle be applied consistently - polluters should pay, not the communities and utilities that are working to clean up their environmental contamination.

Water System Cybersecurity: A Small Operator's Perspective

This Committee received a comprehensive cybersecurity briefing in January 2024 with testimony from four expert witnesses, and I do not intend to repeat what has already been thoroughly covered. Instead, I want to offer a brief update from the perspective of a small system that has taken proactive steps.

In July 2023, Russellville participated in the Horsley Witten EPA Water Sector Cybersecurity Evaluation Program. Based on what we learned, I used Drinking Water SRF funds to completely replace our outdated proprietary telemetry system with the fully modern SCADA system I described earlier in this testimony. For a 26-person operation, that is a significant investment, and it was made possible by the combination of SRF funding and trusted technical assistance.

NRWA supports cybersecurity implementation but believes that education and support, not mandated sanitary surveys, are the right path forward for small systems. Operators and managers need to be educated and prepared by an expert they trust, and an expert that is qualified to train and implement a solution onsite, face to face with the operator. Meaningful security improvements happen in small communities through trusted relationships and practical, affordable solutions, not through one-size-fits-all mandates.

The Regulatory Landscape: The Compounding Burden

As Chairman of NRWA's Regulatory Committee, I actively research and comment on EPA rulemaking on behalf of small and rural water systems. I want to be clear about my perspective: I support the Safe Drinking Water Act. I support strong public health protections. And I want to comply with every rule that EPA promulgates. What I am asking for is recognition that the cumulative weight of regulatory obligations falls differently on a system with 26 staff members than it does on a large, metropolitan utility with hundreds or thousands of employees. Let me offer two examples that illustrate the compounding burden.

First, the Lead and Copper Rule Revisions now require testing inside schools and childcare facilities, with expected expansion to nursing homes and care facilities. This is important public health work, and I support it. In fact, I have personally invited local school systems to EPA's Technical Assistance for Tap Water (TAT) classes to learn proper sampling procedures. But for a 26-person staff that is simultaneously managing drinking water treatment, wastewater operations, distribution maintenance, and all of our other compliance obligations, adding a new sampling and reporting program represents a meaningful new workload. We are doing the work. I simply want the Committee to understand the capacity it requires.

Second, we are required to test for items numerous times even after repeated non-detections, and I believe systems should be granted reduced monitoring for demonstrated non-detects. Russellville has tested for perchlorate since it was included in the first Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule during 2001–2005, and despite consistent non-detections, court-ordered requirements will force us to test for the same compound 20 years later. When a system has established a long track record of non-detection, continued monitoring at the same frequency represents a cost without a proportionate public health benefit. Reduced monitoring for

demonstrated non-detects would free resources for the compliance areas where they are truly needed.

Looking ahead, the potential revisions to the Microbial and Disinfection Byproducts Stage 2 Six-Year Review are of significant concern. Proposed changes could include microbial monitoring requirements such as Legionella testing, storage tank inspection and washout protocols, and consecutive water system improvements. The proposed rule is expected in July 2027 with a final rule in 2028, and its scope could place a substantial new burden on small rural water systems that are already stretched to capacity.

I am not asking Congress to roll back regulations. I am asking for a regulatory approach that considers the cumulative impact on small systems when new rules are promulgated. Each individual rule may be reasonable on its own merits, but they stack on top of each other and land on the same small group of people. We want to comply. We need the resources and flexibility to do it well.

On a constructive note, I want to suggest that Congress consider modernizing the Consumer Confidence Report (CCR) process. Primacy agencies already require Monthly Operating Reports from water systems, and much of that data is publicly available in real time. Rather than requiring separate CCR publications based on data that is 18 months old by the time it reaches consumers, Congress could direct EPA to leverage existing real-time reporting to improve public transparency. This is a forward-looking recommendation, not a complaint, and it reflects the kind of practical modernization that small systems would welcome.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Chairman Guthrie, Chairman Palmer, Ranking Member Tonko, and Members of the Subcommittee, I want to close with a summary of the policy actions that would make the greatest difference for Russellville and the thousands of small and rural water systems I represent through the National Rural Water Association.

State Revolving Fund

Continue and strengthen SRF funding for small and rural systems. Adopt flexible principal forgiveness thresholds. Extend project timeframes. Simplify reporting requirements. Provide BABA and Davis-Bacon waiver flexibility for small projects. Address environmental review delays for projects on previously studied sites.

Workforce Development

Continue supporting the NRWA Registered Apprenticeship Program and water sector workforce development investments. The water sector's workforce crisis is real and accelerating, and small systems that cannot compete on salary need an identifiable career path to attract, train and retain the next generation of operators. Continued federal support for the apprenticeship program is essential to keeping small water utilities staffed and communities served.

Technical Assistance

Ensure that technical assistance under the SDWA is delivered through experienced, trusted providers with demonstrated rural water expertise. Protect the on-site technical assistance model that has served small communities for 50 years. Guard against fragmentation of TA funding among providers without the relationships and expertise to be effective.

PFAS and CERCLA Liability

Enact H.R. 1267, the Water Systems PFAS Liability Protection Act. Ensure that water and wastewater systems, which are passive receivers of PFAS contamination, are not held liable under CERCLA for environmental contamination they did not cause.

Regulatory Approach

Consider the cumulative burden on small systems when promulgating new rules. Provide reduced monitoring for demonstrated non-detects. Modernize CCR reporting to leverage existing real-time data. Ensure that the resources to comply are available before the mandates to comply take effect.

I began my career testing water in a town of 2,000 people. Thirty years later, I am still testing water. And I still believe that there is no more important job in public service than ensuring that when your neighbors turn on the tap, the water is safe. The tools this Committee has created, including the Safe Drinking Water Act, the State Revolving Fund, technical assistance programs, and the historic investment in the IIJA, are making a real difference in communities like mine. I am here to tell you they are working, to tell you where they can work better, and to ask for your continued leadership and partnership.

On behalf of the 31,000 small and rural water systems that NRWA represents, thank you for the honor of testifying today. I am happy to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have.