FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, May 29, 2013

U.S. Conference of Mayors, American Water Works Association and Water Environment Federation Champion Affordability for Low-Income Water Customers

(Washington, D.C.) – As federal requirements to meet specific environmental standards drive up water bills in many U.S. households, a joint issue brief from the U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM), the American Water Works Association (AWWA) and the Water Environment Federation (WEF) proposes that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reassess its definition of affordability.

The EPA’s affordability criteria are intended to relieve undue economic burdens on communities facing federal water mandates. Common federal water mandates include requirements to upgrade wastewater and drinking water treatment facilities and to address overflows of storm water. However, in some communities, the costs for these mandates can reach several billion dollars. According to the three organizations, EPA’s affordability criteria rely too heavily on median household income and underestimate the effect of rising water bills on low-income, fixed-income, and renter-occupied households.

“For residents and businesses in affected cities, the costs associated with federal mandates are often reflected in water and wastewater bills that must grow faster than household income and the general rate of inflation,” said Tom Cochran, CEO and Executive Director of the Conference of Mayors. “This creates significant affordability challenges for lower-income households.”

US communities are facing high costs to upgrade and rehabilitate aging drinking water, wastewater and storm water infrastructure. “An AWWA study shows drinking water infrastructure costs alone will exceed $1 trillion nationwide over the coming 25 years,” said AWWA Executive Director David LaFrance. “Wastewater and storm water needs are enormous as well. EPA often does not count these infrastructure costs in its affordability calculation.”

The three groups offered several alternative metrics for better gauging the affordability of water mandates. They suggest the impact on customer water bills should be assessed across entire income distributions, and especially at the lower end; as a percentage of income for potentially vulnerable populations; across neighborhoods known to be economically at risk; and through a variety of other indicators such as the unemployment rate and the percentage of households receiving public assistance.

“Given the many challenges faced by the water sector, we must encourage technological and financial innovation as we all strive to improve water quality, upgrade our infrastructure and provide self-sustaining essential services to our customers,” said Jeff Eger, WEF Executive Director. “WEF is pleased to join AWWA and USCM to help advance a better understanding and way forward on affordability issues and concerns.”

In addition to the issue brief, titled Assessing the Affordability of Federal Water Mandates, the mayors and water organizations also released an Affordability Assessment Tool for Federal Water Mandates to help communities consider the many factors impacting affordability and fully understand the implications of the federal water mandates they face. The tool includes worksheets to help communities accurately discern the burden of higher water bills on households at different income levels and with various demographic characteristics.

**About the U.S. Conference of Mayors**
The U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM) is the official non-partisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more. There are 1,301 such cities in the country today. Each city is represented in the Conference by its chief elected official, the mayor. To learn more, visit [www.usmayors.org](http://www.usmayors.org).

**About AWWA**
Established in 1881, the American Water Works Association is the oldest and largest nonprofit, scientific and educational association dedicated to safe and sustainable water in the world. With more than 50,000 members worldwide and 43 Sections in North America, AWWA advances public health, safety and welfare by uniting the efforts of the entire water community. To learn more, visit [www.awwa.org](http://www.awwa.org).

**About WEF**
Founded in 1928, the Water Environment Federation (WEF) is a not-for-profit technical and educational organization of 36,000 individual members and 75 affiliated Member Associations representing water quality professionals around the world. WEF members, Member Associations and staff proudly work to achieve our mission to provide bold leadership, champion innovation, connect water professionals, and leverage knowledge to support clean and safe water worldwide. To learn more, visit [www.wef.org](http://www.wef.org).

###