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November 8, 2019

The Honorable Joe Manchin III
Ranking Member
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
306 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Ranking Member Manchin:

As you work to prepare for mark up of S. 1932 the Drought Resiliency and Water Supply Infrastructure Act, which WateReuse Association supports and worked closely with the offices of Senators Feinstein, Sinema, McSally and Gardner on, we wanted to take a moment to explain why we are supportive and why we believe this legislation is so important.

The WateReuse Association is a not-for-profit trade association for water utilities, business, industrial and commercial enterprises, non-profit organizations, and research entities that engage in and on water recycling. WateReuse and its state and regional sections represent more than 250 water utilities serving over 60 million customers, and over 350 businesses, research instructions, and organizations across the county. Our mission is to engage our members in a movement for safe and sustainable water supplies, to promote acceptance and support of recycled water, and to advocate for policies and funding that increase water reuse.

The heart of our interest focuses on the bill's 5-year, \$100 million reauthorization of the Bureau of Reclamation's Title XVI Water Reclamation and Reuse competitive grant program, originally authorized in the 2016 Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act (Title XVI -WIIN). In addition to the key Title XVI-WIIN Competitive Grant Program, the legislation includes funding for desalination, additional funding for surface and groundwater storage, and a new low-interest loan program for the financing of a range of water infrastructure projects.

Title XVI is the only federal program focused on funding locally-led water recycling projects in the western states, and with enactment of the FY 2019 Energy and Water Appropriations bill, the \$50 million authorization for Title XVI-WIIN has been reached. Therefore, it is critical to reauthorize Title XVI-WIIN to support the continued development of water reuse in the West and the development of drought-proof water supplies.

Beginning with the earmark moratorium in 2010, Congress ended the practice of individually authorizing new Title XVI projects. In place of project earmarks, the 2016 WIIN Act created a mechanism to continue support for locally-led water reuse projects by

establishing a competitive grant program within Title XVI, enabling new projects to be eligible for federal assistance. We believe that this was an appropriate and important evolution for the program. During the earmark era, communities were forced to put their critical water reuse projects on hold undermining local economies and threatening public health and safety. Dozens of highly qualified, eligible projects were held up, even after having completed comprehensive feasibility studies. For example, of the eight Title XVI projects authorized in 2009, six of them (75 percent) were first introduced for authorization in 2004 or earlier, with some introduced as early as 2000. We worked closely with Senator Feinstein and others in the 2016 WIIN Act to move beyond this process and instead create a mechanism to continue support for locally-led water reuse projects through a rigorous competitive process.

As you know, competition among potential grantees helps ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely on the most impactful and cost-effective projects. There are many examples across the Government of competitive grant programs working well. For instance, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) operates the Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Program, which has invested \$7.1 billion in competitive grants for large infrastructure projects. In each competition, DOT receives hundreds of applications and assesses them on their merits to help ensure that taxpayers are getting the highest value for every dollar invested.

Similarly, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has invested over \$1 billion in competitive grants, leveraged with nearly \$2 billion in non-federal match, for locally-led conservation projects through its Regional Conservation Partnership Program. This program has a strong track record, and has relied on a robust competitive application process to produce the greatest conservation bang for the buck. U.S. EPA's Water Infrastructure Finance and Investment Act (WIFIA) Program is another example of a highly impactful program where the administering agency implements a rigorous competition to determine which projects get funded. While WIFIA is a loan program and not a grant program, the awards can be up to \$1 billion, and funding decisions are made by EPA. Across the Government, there are dozens of successful programs where the administering agency makes award decisions based on congressionally set criteria and a robust competitive process.

We strongly support the competitive grant approach for the Title XVI program, as provided for in S. 1932. This is the most efficient way for locally-led projects to compete head to head across the West to secure the best return on investment for the federal dollar and to maintain continuity for the program. Turning the clock back to the old days where projects would sit in limbo waiting years for an authorization undermines the economies and health and safety of our communities.

We strongly urge you to move forward with S. 1932 as introduced and we thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Patricia Sinicropi
Executive Director

