



WATERREUSE[®]

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July 2, 2021

**Written Statement on Hearing to Examine Infrastructure Needs
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate**

June 24, 2021

Patricia Sinicropi

Executive Director

WateReuse Association

Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding western water infrastructure needs and the Energy Infrastructure Act, as proposed during the June 24, 2021 Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Committee hearing. I submit this testimony today on behalf of the WateReuse Association and its members to highlight the importance of water reuse and recycling in building resiliency, creating economic opportunities, and strengthening America's infrastructure.

The WateReuse Association is a not-for-profit trade association for water utilities, businesses, 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 200 water utilities serving over 60 million customers, and over 300 businesses and organizations across the country. 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.

We write to express our strong support for investing in the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's (USBR) Title XVI-WIIN Water Reclamation and Reuse Competitive Grants Program in upcoming infrastructure legislation. The Title XVI-WIIN program has helped communities across the West build drought resilience, keep pollutants out of sensitive waterways, save billions of dollars relative to importing water, and grow sustainable economies. It is a key economic and drought preparedness tool but is hamstrung by insufficient funding.

We commend the Committee for including \$5 billion for Western water infrastructure in the Energy Infrastructure Act. This funding includes the Title XVI program; however, it is not clear from the language whether this would include new competitive grant projects as

authorized in section 4009(c) of the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act. We urge the Committee to provide at least \$100 million per year in direct spending for the Title XVI-WIIN competitive grants program, and to ensure that both new and existing Title XVI-WIIN projects are eligible for this funding.

The USBR's Title XVI program is the only federal program with water reuse as its sole focus. Since Title XVI's inception in 1992, Congress has authorized 53 Title XVI recycling projects producing more than 400,000 acre-feet of drought-resistant water supply. To date, Congress has appropriated over \$700 million in federal funding, which has been leveraged with non-federal funding to implement more than \$3.3 billion in water reuse improvements – a nearly 5:1 leverage ratio.

In 2016, the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act established a mechanism, colloquially known as Title XVI-WIIN, to enable new projects to apply for competitive grants within Title XVI. Due to the popularity of Title XVI-WIIN in its first few years, the program now has a large and growing backlog exceeding \$700 million in federal cost share for eligible projects, and demand is expected to grow as more projects become eligible.

Water projects funded through the Title XVI program have been used to increase the supply of fresh drinking water, generate sustainable irrigation water, restore sensitive ecosystems, and help industries expand and create jobs, among other purposes. The program is not limited to the reuse of municipal wastewater – it also helps communities identify beneficial uses for industrial, agricultural, and domestic wastewater, as well as impaired ground and surface water. Investments through the Title XVI competitive grants program have helped both urban and rural communities across the West build a strong and secure economic future.

A recent GAO report (GAO-19-110) highlighted several illustrative Title XVI projects. For example, program investments helped one drought-stricken water district in California develop infrastructure to use more than 2 billion gallons of recycled water to irrigate sports fields, golf courses, parks, and school grounds, invigorating the local economy and improving the quality of life for residents. Another project is providing drought-resistant recycled water to farmers to irrigate 45,000 acres of farmland, reducing demand on the area's over-drafted groundwater basin.

In Texas, El Paso Water is using water recycling and saline groundwater desalination to produce a drought-resilient, cost-effective, and reliable water supply to support a vibrant local economy. Compared to the next best alternative (importing groundwater), El Paso's water reuse program is addressing affordability challenges by saving more than \$1.2 billion, or 74 percent. In Southern California's Chino Basin, local leaders developed the Optimum Basin Management Program (OBMP) to address the region's water challenges. The OBMP saves ratepayers an estimated \$2.4 billion in water supply costs (a 153 percent return on investment), restores instream flows and water quality in the Santa Ana River, and replenishes the Chino Groundwater Basin. Other Title XVI projects have been used to prevent saltwater intrusion into aquifers, restore marshes, wetlands, and other habitat, and create potable drinking water.



As climate change accelerates, and its associated adverse impacts on water resources increase, it is vitally important that the nation invest in water recycling to build resilience, manage energy demands, and ensure America's economic prosperity. Water recycling projects compare favorably to other water supply options by often imposing a smaller carbon footprint and generating fewer air pollution emissions, producing a stable locally controlled water source, reducing extractive water demands and replenishing groundwater.

Investment in water reuse builds communities that are modern, sustainable and stable—ready for families to flourish and businesses to grow. We urge Congress to act swiftly to help communities modernize their infrastructure and protect public health and the environment. Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Pat. Sinicropi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Patricia Sinicropi
Executive Director

