



A SHARED AGENDA FOR

# CLEAN WATER

IN NEW YORK STATE

To ensure that current and future generations can rely on abundant, clean, and affordable water resources in New York, a broad and diverse network of organizations began convening in 2017 to discuss water protection and restoration in New York State. This unprecedented collaboration of organizations includes water suppliers, wastewater treatment operators, environmental organizations, environmental justice organizations, and other water stakeholders.

This network, called the **New York Clean Water Coalition**, works collaboratively to develop a shared agenda for funding, policies, and actions needed to protect clean water in New York State. The items listed are not exhaustive of the policies the organizations are supporting; however, the items listed reflect the top shared clean water priorities and policies for 2024.



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# NYS CLEAN WATER

## PRIORITIES FOR 2024

### CLEAN WATER FUNDING

**Provide \$600 Million for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act (CWIA) in SFY 2024-25, as Part of a 5-year Commitment of at Least \$4 Billion:** Since 2017, New York has invested \$5 billion in the CWIA, making NY a national leader in clean water protection, while yielding significant results for our environment, health, and economy. However, we still have substantial work to do to address NY's drinking water and wastewater infrastructure needs, which is estimated at \$80 billion over 20 years. This massive, yet conservative estimate does not include other clean water needs in New York, including treating drinking water for emerging contaminants, drinking water source protection, lead service line replacement, harmful algal bloom response and prevention, climate resilient infrastructure, and more. **To address New York's wide-ranging clean water needs, and to address rising costs economy-wide, we urge New York State to invest \$600 million in the CWIA in SFY 2024-25, with funding category allocations lined out in the budget to provide transparency and to help ensure all our clean water needs are being adequately met, such as the line for lead service line replacement. Furthermore, to continue New York's nation-leading commitment to clean water, we urge New York to make another long-term commitment of at least \$4 billion over 5 years in the CWIA.**

**Provide Local Governments with Annual Funding for Operations and Management (O&M) for Drinking Water, Stormwater, and Wastewater Infrastructure:** Providing reliable and consistent funding to all local governments for water infrastructure (similar to the current Consolidated Local Street and

Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS) program) will allow municipalities to maintain water systems more effectively, rather than paying a much higher environmental and economic cost of reacting to and fixing major water infrastructure failures, which is the current and unsustainable practice. **Resources provided for O&M would serve as a valuable supplement to major capital investments, not a replacement, given the massive backlog of water infrastructure capital projects needed across the state.**

**Replace and Upgrade Septic Systems Across New York State:** The NYS Septic Replacement Program, under the CWIA, has been successful in regions like Suffolk and Nassau Counties on Long Island, although more work needs to be done. However, allocations are not meeting the need in the Adirondacks, Finger Lakes, Southern Tier, Hudson Valley, and other areas across the state with significant concentrations of failing septic systems along critical water bodies. **We urge the Governor and legislature to support an increase in funding to eligible counties to assist homeowners with grants across the state to replace failing septic systems with new advanced treatment systems called Innovative Alternatives (IAs) that reduce pollution, and protect the health of local aquifers, lakes, rivers, streams, bays and harbors. Furthermore, eligibility requirements for receiving support under the program should be adjusted to not only include water bodies that are impaired, but also water bodies that are known to have harmful algal blooms (HABs).** New York State has committed to addressing HABs through its statewide HAB action plan and should not wait for a lengthy process to classify a waterbody as impaired in order to act.

**Extend and Fund the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP):** The challenges that

low-income households face in paying their water and sewer bills presents an ongoing challenge to utilities' ability to increase their own investments in safe water and clean water infrastructure. During the pandemic, with federal funds, the state was able to provide nearly \$70 million in water bill assistance to low-income households, through the new, but temporary, Low Income Household Water Assistance (LIHWAP) program. This helped over 40,000 families by providing funds on their behalf to utilities in every county across the state. But funding for the program expired over the summer. Nationally, advocates and utilities are pushing for more federal funding and creation of a permanent program, but that is unlikely to happen any time soon given politics in DC. **The state has an opportunity to step into the void by funding the LIHWAP program in New York State.**

**Invest in Clean Water Infrastructure Workforce Development:** Continuing to provide New Yorkers with clean water hinges on recruiting and retaining competent drinking water and wastewater operators. The water industry is facing widespread shortages of qualified workers due to retirement of the existing workforce, and there is a need to replace these workers with individuals that have the technical and scientific skills to operate our advanced treatment systems. **Therefore, we ask for expanded funding for existing apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs for water and wastewater operators through SUNY, as well as consideration of meaningful reforms to Tier 6 of the New York State Retirement and Civil Service Systems so that we can protect the public health and the environment for the benefit of all New Yorkers.**

**Provide Drinking Water Infrastructure Engineering Planning Grants:** There is an urgent need to expand grant limitations to support engineering planning studies for drinking water infrastructure projects. This is already in place for wastewater projects, and is a resounding success, particularly for smaller, cash-strapped municipalities that lack the staff and capacity to conduct planning themselves. **We urge New York State to provide at least \$2 million for drinking water infrastructure engineering planning grants in SFY 2024-25.** It is critical that DOH is provided with staffing resources to support this program and other important drinking water protection initiatives led by the agency.

## PROTECT DRINKING WATER FROM EMERGING CONTAMINANTS

**Stop PFAS at Its Source:** Toxic PFAS, also known as "forever chemicals," are polluting drinking water

sources and threatening public health in communities across the state. As the state and federal government works to limit PFAS in drinking water, we must turn off the tap to additional PFAS chemicals. It is far more cost effective and protective of public health to stop PFAS at its source, rather than paying for clean up later. According to a recent study conducted in Minnesota, PFAS can be bought for \$50 - \$100 per pound, but costs between \$2.7 million and \$18 million per pound to remove and eliminate from municipal wastewater, depending on facility size. **We urge New York State to pass legislation that will enact a comprehensive ban on the use of PFAS chemicals across multiple sectors.**

**Private Well Testing and Treatment:** There are 1.1 million private wells in New York State, serving nearly four million residents. Failure to test these wells for emerging contaminants (e.g. PFOA, PFOS, and 1,4-dioxane, which are already being tested for in public water supplies of all sizes due to the threat they pose to public health) and other toxic chemicals puts New Yorkers at risk. **New York State should provide additional resources to allow more households to test private wells for harmful contaminants that threaten their health, as well as resources to treat well water when harmful contaminants are detected or funds for homes to connect to a public water supply, if available.**

**Expand Capacity to Test Water for Emerging Contaminants:** Currently, municipal samples for emerging contaminants, such as PFAS, are sent to laboratories certified through DOH's Environmental Laboratory Approval Program (ELAP). As New York regulates more emerging contaminants to protect drinking water from new threats and to comply with new drinking water regulations that have been proposed by EPA, existing backlogs and delays at ELAP labs are expected to worsen, and additional resources are needed to ensure that laboratories have sufficient capacity to handle increased testing. **To ensure timely results for testing water for emerging contaminants and to protect public health, we urge the Governor and legislature to invest in expanding capacity to test for emerging contaminants in New York State.**

**Provide Communications Guidance to Local Governments and Water Suppliers:** As more communities discover emerging contaminants that exceed growing notification levels and MCLs, water suppliers and local governments are ill-equipped to communicate health risks to the public. **It is crucial that clear and scientifically accurate health risk communication is provided by DOH for water suppliers' dissemination to their communities.**



## PROTECT OUR WATERS AT THE SOURCE

**Protect Our Waters from Road Salt:** Road salt used for deicing roads contributes to significant threats to drinking water sources across the state. **We urge the NYS DOT to implement the newly released Adirondack Road Salt Task Force Report and its recommendations within the Adirondack Park. New York State should then work to apply the report's findings statewide, benefiting water supplies for all New Yorkers. Furthermore, grant funds from the NYSDEC Road Salt Storage Facility program should also be used to fund equipment for best management practices (BMPs) set out in the report.**

**Support Water Bill Fairness:** Stormwater runoff is one of the leading causes of pollution to our waters. Managing stormwater is critical to protecting our environment and reducing flooding; however, it is critical that localities do so in a way that is fair to ratepayers while generating enough revenue to implement stormwater runoff solutions, including green infrastructure. **We urge the Governor and the legislature to affirm that localities can decouple the costs of stormwater management from potable water usage and instead impose a stormwater runoff fee.** Over 2,100 cities in the United States, including

Philadelphia and Baltimore, take this approach to stormwater management. This cures the imbalance faced in communities by ensuring that properties with large impervious areas, but little potable water usage, pay their fair share to maintain sewer systems and stormwater infrastructure.

**Support Strong Protections for New York State's Freshwater Wetlands:** In 2022, Governor Hochul and the Legislature strengthened and expanded the New York State Freshwater Wetlands Act, which will allow the Department of Environmental Conservation to protect an additional one million acres of freshwater wetlands from destruction or degradation. Now, the Department needs to update its freshwater wetland regulations to reflect these new statutory requirements, and **we urge New York State to develop the strongest regulations possible – particularly in light of Sackett v. EPA, which stripped federal protections from 60% of the United States's wetlands. We also encourage the Department to continue to review the impacts of the Sackett decision on New York State's waters and assess whether additional state protections will be needed to make up for reduced federal oversight.**



## ENDORISING ORGANIZATIONS:

Citizens Campaign for the Environment  
New York Water Environment Association  
Adirondack Council  
New York League of Conservation Voters  
Environmental Advocates NY  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
The Nature Conservancy in New York  
Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter  
New York Section American  
Water Works Association

Save The River Upper  
St Lawrence Riverkeeper  
Save the Sound  
New York Rural Water Association  
National Audubon Society  
Scenic Hudson  
Earthjustice  
Riverkeeper  
Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper

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