

# Opposition to the Voluntary Water Partnerships for Distressed Communities Act (S. 2596)

Dear Senate Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Chairman Barrasso and Ranking Member Carper

We, the undersigned organizations, strongly oppose the “Voluntary Water Partnership for Distressed Communities Act.” Despite the title, the bill will serve to coerce communities into privatizing their public water systems. It is inappropriate, unjust and unreasonable. Furthermore, this bill will most likely lead to more water privatization, poor water quality, and higher rates that would disproportionately impact Black, Brown and Indigenous communities. We urge you to OPPOSE this legislation and OPPOSE adding it to the America’s Water Infrastructure Act of 2020 (S. 3591).

This bill provides perverse incentives for communities to privatize water systems while failing to ensure long-term compliance with drinking water quality standards. The bill would allow a water system with drinking water quality violations to avoid fines and penalties for those violations by privatizing the system through an asset sale or operations and management contract. While states should have the flexibility to help municipalities address water quality violations through public sector collaboration and municipalization of struggling private systems, large water corporations are more likely than public sector entities to exploit the changes and grants proposed in this bill. A large corporation will likely seek to use this enforcement preference as a hammer to force privatization on a community that would otherwise reject it.

This bill unjustly authorizes a privatized water system to provide unsafe water for three years. After privatizing, the water system has an additional three years to comply with federal regulations for drinking water quality before facing enforcement mechanisms. But even after this period of providing unsafe water, there are no additional penalties or any “strings attached” to ensure that the privatized system will comply in the future to provide safe water beyond the enforcement mechanisms that the existing system faces.

The bill unreasonably gives grants to support the expansion of a water corporation’s business. This waste of American taxpayer dollars will likely benefit a small number of corporations, which operate only in a handful of states. Grant dollars should support only publicly owned or nonprofit systems and providers. Nearly 9 of out 10 Americans receive their tap water from a publicly owned system.

This bill wrongly assumes that privatization will necessarily improve water quality. In many cases, for systems large and small, private control of water systems has resulted in worse drinking water quality. For example, Pittsburgh's water quality violations followed a chemical treatment change that occurred after the city hired a large multinational firm to provide management and consulting services. Similarly, in Oklahoma, a large international firm received the largest water quality fine in the state's history for a laundry list of violations of federal and state law that occurred while it operated and managed the water system of the small city of Hugo.

We are concerned that this legislation is being promoted as helping our most vulnerable communities. No provision within the legislation protects vulnerable communities from being forced into privatization against their own wish. Privatization, poor water quality, and higher rates disproportionately impact Black, Brown and Indigenous communities. In addition to not necessarily improving water quality, privatization leads to higher rates and worse service, in order to maximize corporate profits. Private utilities typically charge 59% more for water service than local government utilities. Higher rates lead to more shutoffs when people can't afford to pay their bills. Private utilities often reduce their workforce; on average 1 in 3 jobs is lost when a utility goes from public to private. This leads to maintenance backlogs, other service problems, and lost jobs in these communities.

Finally, this bill detracts from real solutions that can address the serious public health consequences of drinking water quality violations. Instead, we ask that you support nonprofit technical assistance and robust grant funding for struggling water systems through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund program. These are tried, true, proven and reliable ways to directly improve drinking water quality for Americans.

Again, we urge you to OPPOSE the Voluntary Water Partnerships for Distressed Communities Act and OPPOSE adding it to the America's Water Infrastructure Act (S. 3591).

Sincerely,

Food & Water Action  
1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East MD/DC  
350 Central Mass  
350 Chicago  
350 New Orleans  
350 NJ - Rockland  
Action Center on Race and the Economy (ACRE)  
Active Hope Group Gallup NM  
Advocates for Cherry Valley  
African Heritage Economic Initiative  
AFSCME  
AFSCME Council 3  
AFSCME Council 31

Alliance for Democracy  
American Family Voices  
American Family Voices  
American Indian Center INC  
Assateague Coastal Trust  
Autntic Occupational Therapy, Inc.  
Aytzim: Ecological Judaism  
Bees On Board  
Berks Gas Truth  
Better Building Institute Inc.  
Better Path Coalition  
Blue Water Baltimore  
Build A Movement 2020  
Cahaba River Society  
Campaign for Lead Free Water  
Carbondale Spring Food Autonomy Project  
Catalyst Beer Company  
Center for Biological Diversity  
Central Illinois Progressive Democrats of America  
Central NJ Chapter - The Climate Reality Project  
Chicago Against Privatizing Our Water (CAPOW)  
Chicago Area Peace Action  
Chicago Asian Americans for Environmental Justice  
Chicago Democratic Socialists of America  
Chicago Greens  
Chicago Women Take Action  
Church Women United in New York State  
Citizen Action/IL  
Citizens Act to Protect Our Water  
Citizens for a Greener Illinois  
Citizens for Water  
Citizens United for Renewable Energy (CURE)  
Clean Power Lake County  
Cleanwater Linganore Inc.  
Coalition Against Pilgrim Pipeline  
Coalition for Economic Justice  
Coalition to Protect New York  
CodePink Long Island  
Color of Change  
Come Together Rockford  
Comite Dialogo Ambiental, Inc  
Community Action Works  
Conceivable Future

Conejos Clean Water  
Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes  
Cook County Democratic Party  
Corporate Accountability  
Corporate Campaign, Inc.  
CT Working Families Organization  
Damascus Citizens for Sustainability  
Deep Time Chicago  
Delaware Riverkeeper Network  
Derechos Humanos y Medio Ambiente  
Detroit Jews for Justice  
Director Deignan Institute for Earth and Spirit at Iona  
District Council 37, AFSCME, AFL-CIO  
Dominican Sisters of Springfield, IL Leadership Team & Justice Committee  
Don't Gas the Meadowlands Coalition  
Earth Action, Inc.  
Earthwise365!  
East End Action Network (EEAN)  
Eco-Poetry.org  
Edwards & Jennings, PC  
Embodied Wholeness  
Empire State Consumer Project, Inc.  
Environmental Advocates NY  
Environmental Justice Taskforce of the WNY Peace Center  
First Congregational Church  
Flint Rising  
FLOW (For Love of Water)  
Food & Water Action  
Fox Valley Citizens for Peace & Justice  
Frack Free Four Corners  
FrackBustersNY  
Franciscan Response to Fossil Fuels  
Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement  
Freshwater Future  
Freshwater Lab  
Friends of the Earth U.S.  
Friends of the Moshassuck  
FruitBelt Advisory Council  
Great Old Broads for Wilderness  
Greater Highland Area Concerned Citizens  
Green Glen Cove  
Green Party of Nassau County  
Green Party of New Jersey

Green Sanctuary, Unitarian Universalist Church of Reading  
Greyspace Collective  
Grounded Strategies  
Hall's Choice Farm LTD  
Hill District Consensus Group  
Hilton Head for Peace  
Hinenu: The Baltimore Justice Shtiebel  
Hip Hop Caucus  
Hunger Action Network NYS  
Illinois People's Action  
Imagine Water Works  
In the Public Interest  
Indivisible Cranbury  
Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Baltimore City  
Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVA)  
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement  
Iowa Citizens for Responsible Agriculture, Worth County  
Ironbound Community Corporation  
Jubilee Farm  
Junction Coalition  
Just Harvest  
Justice Action Mobilization Network  
Kairos Center for Religions, Rights and Social Justice  
Lady Freethinker  
LI Clean Air Water & Soil, Ltd  
Long Island Progressive Coalition  
Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership  
Maryknoll Sisters  
Maryland Legislative Coalition  
Massachusetts Avenue Project  
Maurice & Jane Sugar Law Center for Economic and Social Justice  
Metro East Green Alliance (IL)  
Metro New York Catholic Climate Movement  
Mi Villita Neighbors  
MI/Welfare Rights Organization  
Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation  
Michigan Coalition for Human Rights  
Michigan Interfaith Power & Light  
Michigan Nurses Association  
Milwaukee Riverkeeper  
Milwaukee Water Commons  
MLK Coalition of Greater Los Angeles  
MoveOn.org Hoboken

Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment  
NAACP Chicago Southside  
Nassau Hiking & Outdoor Club  
National Lawyers Guild, Maryland Chapter  
National Lawyers Guild, Michigan/Detroit Chapter  
National Organization for Women, Northern New Jersey Chapter  
Nature Coast Conservation, Inc.  
Neighbors for Environmental Justice  
Network of Holistic Activists  
New Energy Economy  
New Jersey Appleseed Public Interest Law Center  
New Jersey Tenants Organization  
New Mexico Environmental Law Center  
New Paltz Climate Action Coalition  
New York Communities for Change (NYCC)  
New York State Nurses Association  
Newburgh Clean Water Project  
Nine Mile Run Watershed Association  
NJ Skylands Sunrise Movement Hub  
NJ State Industrial Union Council  
NJ Student Sustainability Coalition  
No Sharon Gas Pipeline | Clean Energy Now  
Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson  
North American Climate, Conservation and Environment (NACCE)  
North County Watch  
North Jersey Sierra  
North Star Special Events  
Northern Illinois Jobs with Justice  
Northern Michigan Environmental Action Council (NMEAC)  
Northern New Jersey NOW  
NY Water Action  
NYC Grassroots Alliance  
NYC H2O  
NYC Labor Council for Latin American Advancements  
NYPIRG  
Occupy Bergen County  
Office of Life, Peace, Justice & Creation  
Office of Peace, Justice, and Ecological Integrity, Sisters of Charity of St. Elizabeth  
Open Buffalo  
Orange Residents Against Pilgrim Pipelines  
Oregon Environmental Council  
Our Revolution  
Our Revolution Butler

Our Revolution Maryland  
Our Revolution New Mexico  
Park Watershed  
Partner for Health  
Partnership for the Public Good - Buffalo Niagara  
Pass It On Network  
Pax Christi Metro New York  
Peace Action of Staten Island  
Penley Global Law  
Pennsylvania Council of Churches  
People Demanding Action  
People Over Pipelines  
Peoples Climate Movement, NY  
Permaculture Institute of North America  
Philadelphia DSA  
Physicians for Social Responsibility, AZ Chapter  
Pittsburgh United  
Plumbers Local Union 200  
Prince George's County Peace & Justice Coalition  
Progressive Democrats of America  
Promoting Health and Sustainable Energy (PHASE)  
Public Justice Center  
PUSH Buffalo  
Raritan Headwaters  
Reach Out America  
Recode.org  
Reconstructing Judaism  
Redemptoristine Nuns  
Refund America Project (RAP)  
Religious Organizations Along the River (ROAR)  
Resist the Pipeline  
Restore the Delta  
Rio Grande Valley Broadband  
Rural Justice Network  
Rutgers University Progressive  
San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council  
Sana Global-Mujeres de la Tierra /Women of the Earth Collective  
Sanford-Oquaga Area Concerned Citizens (S-OACC)  
Sanford-Oquaga Area Concerned Citizens (S-OACC)  
SANIPLAN  
Santoni, Vocci & Ortega, LLC  
Save Our Water CT  
Se Acuililló?

Seneca Lake Guardian, A Waterkeeper Affiliate  
Shawnee Forest Sentinels  
Show Up Long Island  
Sisters of Charity Federation  
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Congregational and Western Province Leadership  
Sisters of Charity of New York  
Sisters of St. Dominic of Blauvelt, New York  
Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, New Windsor, NY  
Skylands Group, NJ Sierra Club  
SoCal 350 Climate Action  
Social Eco Education-LA (SEE-LA)  
SOUL In Action  
South Baltimore Community Land Trust  
Southeast Side Coalition to Ban Petcoke  
Southern Illinoisans Against Fracturing our Environment (SAFE)  
Straits Area Concerned Citizens for Peace, Justice and Environment  
Sullivan Alliance for Sustainable Development  
Sunrise Movement Baltimore  
Sustainable Food Trade Association  
Take Back the Grid  
The Banner Newsletter  
The Center for Rural Enterprise and Environmental Justice  
The Climate Mobilization - Hudson Chapter  
The Color of Water Project  
The Democracy Collaborative  
The People's Lobby  
The Story of Stuff Project  
The WASH Project  
The Water Collaborative  
The Wei LLC  
Thomas Berry Forum for Ecological Dialogue at Iona College  
Tikkun  
Top Hat Tech LLC  
Topanga Peace Alliance  
Toxics Information Project (TIP)  
Ujima Company, Inc.  
Unitarian Universalist Church of the Lehigh Valley  
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Sussex County Social Action Team  
United Church of Christ Detroit Metro. Assoc. Social Justice Team  
United Nations Association of Greater Chicago  
United Nations Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples  
United Parents Against Lead & Other Environmental Hazards (UPAL)  
Ursulines of the Roman Union - Eastern Province



Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative  
Virginia Interfaith Power & Light  
Virginia Interfaith Power & Light  
Water Rights Awareness of PA  
Water You Fighting For?  
Waterspirit  
We the People of Detroit  
WESPAC Foundation, Inc  
Western New York Environmental Allinace  
Western New York Law Center  
Westmoreland Marcellus Citizens' Group  
WildEarth Guardians  
Will County Board Member Rachel Ventura, District 9  
Wittenberg Center for Alternative Resources  
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, US  
Working Families Party