

August 31, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
United States Capitol Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Senate Majority Leader  
United States Capitol Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
House Minority Leader  
United States Capitol Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Minority Leader  
United States Capitol Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

**RE: Nation's Special Districts Support Passage of the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act**

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Leader McCarthy and Leader McConnell:

The National Special Districts Coalition (NSDC), representing thousands of special districts and their stakeholders, congratulate the Senate on its landmark passage of the bipartisan *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* (H.R. 3684). **As special districts providing critical infrastructure services stand to directly benefit from many new or enhanced programs authorized under the bill, we, the undersigned members of NSDC, support the swift passage of the legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives and ask the House to meet its September 27 deadline to do so.**

Special districts, also known as special purpose districts, provide millions of Americans with drinking water, wastewater treatment, irrigation, transit, roads, airports, ports, electricity, broadband, resource conservation, and more. These local governments need resources to expand and rehabilitate aging infrastructure to continue providing high-quality, public-sector services.

More than \$1.2 trillion in much-needed investments would, in part, aid special districts' ability to boost regional economies, better serve disadvantaged communities, and continue improving the quality of life in communities across the country. While NSDC supports many of the policies embodied in H.R. 3684, there are several programs that are of specific interest to our members:

**Increased funding for drinking water, clean water, and sustainability-focused programming.** More than 7,500 special districts provide clean drinking water and wastewater services across the nation, and they rely on critical programs such as the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds to complete vital projects to ensure water service, quality, and reliability. We support the more-than \$52 billion in funding that would be authorized for these programs over the next five years.

Furthermore, districts strive to comply with water quality standards to ensure drinking water is safe and that natural environments are preserved, and they remain focused on threats to quality, such as PFAS. We commend the inclusion of \$10 billion in the bill to address PFAS, as well as other important measures to address water quality concerns.

**Historic airport, port, roads, and transit investments.** Special districts play a key role in the mobility of passengers and cargo, thus stimulating local, regional, state, and national economies. NSDC is encouraged by the record level of authorizations the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* sets for these programs. Noteworthy investments include the creation of the \$7.5 billion Local and Regional Project Assistance program for capital investments in surface transportation infrastructure, which would assist locally- and regionally significant highway, bridge, transit, port, and airport projects. Furthermore, various programs to facilitate the development of resilient and climate-friendly transit and multimodal projects would accelerate special districts' goals to reduce air pollution and advance programs to curb climate change – especially with the authorization of the \$8.7 billion Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Program. Finally,

among other authorizations, the Coalition supports provisions for \$4.75 billion in the “State of Good Repair” and \$5.25 billion to fund low- and no-emission transit busses.

**Addressing wildfire and forest management.** NSDC applauds the proposed *Stafford Act* amendment to include wildfire in the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Program, which would have a dramatic positive impact on districts operating in the wildland-urban interface, as well as water and irrigation districts dependent on watershed in high fire risk regions. These policies would provide opportunities for the nation’s resource conservation districts, among others, to engage and contribute to wildfire mitigation efforts. We also support the \$3.37 billion authorization for the Department of Interior and U.S. Forest Service to implement wildfire risk reduction programs.

**Broadband expansion and deployment.** Much like the nation’s rural electric cooperatives, special districts are uniquely situated to support and deploy broadband services to underserved and rural communities. Many, especially in the Pacific Northwest, have made great strides to bridge the digital divide for residents in need of this 21<sup>st</sup> century service. Special districts across the country would benefit from a \$42.5 billion authorization for the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Programs to bring middle-mile and last-mile services – and the economic development it brings – to communities still awaiting reliable, high-speed internet access.

**Attention to energy infrastructure and grid reliability.** Successful initiatives to prevent power outages for hazard mitigation and reduce outages due to extreme weather, natural disasters, and wildfire risk are crucial to the continuity of critical services during emergency events. NSDC supports \$5 billion in authorizations to address challenges grid operators and electricity providers face and an additional \$5 billion in research for resilience, reliability, and demonstration projects to further prevent disasters, such as those experienced during the February 2021 winter storm in Texas and throughout the West in recent heat waves. We also support billions in authorizations for renewable energy integration programming to enhance grid reliability, as well as proposals to incentivize hydropower.

**Mitigating cybersecurity risks.** The Coalition supports the development of cybersecurity programs to protect the grid against bad actors. This includes the authorization of a competitive Rural and Municipal Utility Advanced Cybersecurity Grant and Technical Assistance Program, which would assist public utility, municipal utility, irrigation, and electric districts with safeguarding their infrastructure, as well as a \$1 billion infusion of funds to FEMA’s operations and support account for cybersecurity grants to state and local governments.

**Focus on worsening drought and water storage solutions.** As the drought in the Western United States deepens and uncertainty grows among irrigation and drinking water districts, the Coalition supports the bill’s inclusion of \$8.3 billion for Bureau of Reclamation programs addressing the crisis. Investments in groundwater recharge, further surface water storage projects, enhanced conveyance and other innovative water supply and drought mitigation projects, would aid irrigation districts’ ability to provide for a large share of the country’s agriculture production as well as ensure public drinking water systems do not run dry, while funding for grants to improve watershed health provide opportunities for ecological sustainability. Furthermore, NSDC backs funding for large-scale water recycling and reuse – a sound, proven method for a maintained water supply. Finally, we support authorizations to address Colorado River drought contingency plans, as millions of Americans and millions of irrigated acres depend on district-provided resources from the river.

Thank you for your hard work and leadership on this robust package complete with sound, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure investments. As Congress works toward final passage of the bill, we urge you to consider how these programs will impact the nation’s 30,000+ special districts and ensure they have fair, equitable access to critical resources authorized within the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*. We stand ready to work with you and your colleagues to support the ultimate passage of this landmark legislation.

Sincerely,

Members of the National Special Districts Coalition:




Neil McCormick  
Chief Executive Officer  
California Special Districts Association



Ann Terry  
Executive Director  
Special Districts Association of Colorado



David Ramba  
Executive Director  
Florida Association of Special Districts



Frank Stratton  
Executive Director  
Special Districts Association of Oregon



Brian Flynn  
Executive Director  
South Carolina Association of Special Purpose Districts



LeGrand Bitter  
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Utah Association of Special Districts



Rosemary Lantta  
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Wyoming Association of Special Districts



Cliff Avery  
Executive Director  
Texas State Association of Fire and Emergency Districts