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March 6, 2024

The Honorable Tom Carper, Chairman
The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito, Ranking Member
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Carper and Senator Capito,

At the Erie Water Works (EWW), we strive to provide a safe and affordable public service to our residential, commercial and industrial customers. We are concerned that EPA's proposed designation of PFOA and PFOS as hazardous substances under CERCLA – which is now in final review at OMB – will cause water systems and our ratepayers, rather than the companies that polluted our water, to incur environmental cleanup liability that should be faced by those responsible. **We therefore ask you to support a statutory protection for water systems from liability under CERCLA for PFAS to help ensure that the polluters, not our customers, pay for PFAS cleanup.**

CERCLA was built on a “polluter pays” principle, envisioned as holding companies that produced and profited from the hazardous substances that were discharged into the environment responsible for their cleanup. This polluter pays principle is praiseworthy – but unfortunately, the proposed designation of PFOA and PFOS nondegradable “forever chemicals,” which are now ubiquitous in the environment— means that drinking water and wastewater utilities that passively receive these substances into their systems could face CERCLA cleanup liability simply because an upstream polluter deposited the chemicals in their water supplies.

A CERCLA designation for PFAS exposes drinking water and wastewater utilities like ours to potential litigation from the actual polluters. PFAS users and producers can abuse litigation to reduce their own clean-up costs and increase costs on water utilities – costs that we are then forced to pass along to our customers, many who live in the poorest zip codes in America. Even when water systems are able to successfully defend ourselves in court against CERCLA claims, the cost of that litigation alone could contribute to the ongoing water affordability challenge.


CERCLA liability will be an additional burden on top of the significant treatment costs utilities will incur to meet Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act PFAS regulations. CERCLA would unjustly make ratepayers pay yet again for the environmental remedial burden that should be borne by the companies that produced and profited from PFAS for decades.

With this proposed rule under final review this spring, it is critical that Congress move quickly to ensure water systems and their ratepayers are not unfairly punished for PFAS contamination for which they bear zero responsibility or blame. **I therefore urge you to support S. 1430, the Water Systems PFAS Liability Protection Act**, introduced by Sen. Cynthia Lummis. This bill would preserve the “polluter pays” principle under CERCLA and ensure that water utilities can continue to focus their efforts on maintaining water quality.

Again, we ask that you support S. 1430 and protect water system ratepayers by providing statutory liability protections related to PFAS under CERCLA.

Sincerely,

ERIE WATER WORKS


Craig H. Palmer, PE
Chief Executive Officer

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