

February 2, 2024

The Honorable Brian Schatz
Chairman, Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
U.S. Senate
S-722 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Vice Chairman
U.S. Senate
S-522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Support for the Tribal Access to Clean Water Act of 2023

Dear Senator Schatz and Senator Murkowski,

We are writing to express our strong support for the Tribal Access to Clean Water Act, S. 2385, which will provide sorely needed technical assistance, capacity, and resources to address the inequity in access to clean water for Tribes.

Access to clean water is a basic human right. Clean water is foundational for human health and for growing economies, and it should not be a struggle for communities to access or afford. However, 48 percent of households on Native American reservations do not have clean water or adequate sanitation. Native American homes are 19 times more likely than white households to lack indoor plumbing.

This issue is a growing crisis, and the undersigned groups thank you for championing this issue by holding hearings on tribal water infrastructure in 2023 and now holding a legislative hearing for this critical legislation. While the funding for safe drinking water systems for Tribal communities received in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act was both historic and timely, the funding now available for construction and repair of domestic water systems in Indian country is not a complete solution. Technical assistance is needed to allow Tribes to plan and design the systems necessary to access clean drinking water and bring those plans to the “shovel ready” stage where they can take advantage of the newly available construction funding. In addition, Tribes need support to develop the managerial, financial, and regulatory capacity required for a fully functional and self-sustaining utility.

Finally, because Tribes cannot rely on the same types and volumes of revenue streams to support operation and maintenance (O&M) of water systems due to smaller ratepayer bases, O&M assistance helps to ensure that the benefits of infrastructure investment are sustainable. Last year during Senate Indian Affairs and Senate Environment and Public Works hearings on tribal water infrastructure, both Republican and Democratic witnesses agreed on this key point. The Tribal Access to Clean Water Act of 2023 authorizes increased funding for O&M assistance through Indian Health Services over the next five years, and would help utilities serving tribes overcome this challenge.

The Tribal Access to Clean Water Act of 2023 would address the aforementioned gaps and advance the Federal Government’s treaty and trust obligations to provide clean and accessible water for Native communities. We strongly support swift passage of The Tribal Access to Clean Water Act.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
Anthropocene Alliance

Bayou City Waterkeeper
Earthjustice
Endangered Habitats League
Food and Water Watch
For the Love of Water (FLOW)
Freshwater Future
GreenLatinos
League of Conservation Voters
Passaic River Coalition
River Network
Rural Coalition
Sierra Club
Massachusetts River Alliance
National Audubon Society
National Coalition for Education and Legislation on Affordable Water
National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council
Waterkeeper Alliance
Waterkeepers Chesapeake
West Michigan Environmental Action Council