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## **NRWA STATEMENT ON ENACTING THE AGRICULTURE IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2018**

The National Rural Water Association's (NRWA) 31,000 water and wastewater system members applaud President Trump for signing H.R. 2, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018. NRWA would also like to thank Chairman Roberts, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Stabenow, Ranking Member Peterson and their staffs for crafting this legislation that will directly benefit rural America.

Rural and small communities owe a great debt of gratitude to these agriculture champions for recognizing and supporting water infrastructure investments specifically targeted to communities with populations less than 10,000 persons. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Water and Wastewater loan and grant program will provide for the necessary resources to address critical rural water infrastructure projects. In addition, Circuit Rider technical assistance, grassroots source water protection and wastewater technical assistance will allow for uninterrupted water and sanitation service to water utilities in small and rural communities across the country. No community can prosper or be sustainable without reliable and affordable water and wastewater service. With these federal investments, rural and small-towns across the country will be much stronger.

For over 70 years, Congress has authorized and strengthened USDA's rural water initiatives which have made great advancements in the standard of living in rural America. Small and rural communities primarily rely on the USDA's Rural Development Water and Waste Water Programs as the affordable choice to finance their utilities. Most U.S. water utilities are small; over 91% of the country's approximately 50,000 drinking water systems serve communities with fewer than 10,000 people and approximately 80% of the country's 16,000 wastewater systems serve fewer than 10,000 people. The rural water infrastructure provisions included in HR 2 will continue to be the engine of economic development and agricultural-related advances in rural communities. We would like to thank the President and Congress for the specific provisions contained within the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 as follows:

- Section 6402: Expands the eligibility to the Water and Waste Water Guaranteed Loan program to 50,000 population with priority for communities under 10,000. This change will provide an additional financial option for small and rural communities to upgrade, modernize and construct water and waste water facilities in areas that still experience limited access to credit.
- Section 6403: Authorizes U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) rural water loans and grants which are essential to helping small and rural communities overcome the limited economies of scale and

low median household incomes to provide safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation. The initiative funds construction and expansion of drinking water and wastewater infrastructure through grants and loans provided at reasonable rates and terms. Without this assistance, many communities would not have the means to construct new water systems, expand existing systems, or comply with federal mandates. Since 1940, USDA's rural water program has invested over \$55 billion in rural America.

- Expansion of Section 6404: expands existing technical assistance to include providing local communities with long-term water infrastructure sustainability through intergovernmental partnerships, regionalization, and voluntary consolidation. Rural utilities will be able to receive third party independent financial and operational assessments necessary to present all options available for local decision makers to make sound financial and sustainable decisions for their utilities and their customers. Additional authority to target emerging contaminants of drinking and surface water supplies will preserve and enhance the health and vitality of these communities.
- Section 6405: Authorizes primary technical assistance for local communities to operate safe and clean drinking water systems and helps to ensure compliance with current water regulations. Circuit riders are in the field every day helping small and rural communities with water system compliance, operations, maintenance, management, training and disaster response. According to small and rural communities, this initiative is the most effective and efficient direct compliance assistance with the Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act.

NRWA commends Congress and the Administration for yet again providing dramatic improvements to the quality of life, the environment and public health in rural America. NRWA has a long-standing, productive and successful partnership with the US Department of Agriculture and looks forward continuing to work together to benefit rural America and its residents.

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#### About NRWA

The National Rural Water Association is the largest public drinking water and sanitation utility organization representing the interests of more than 31,000 water and wastewater utilities nationwide. NRWA provides training and technical assistance through 49 affiliated State Rural Water Associations dedicated to supporting and promoting the water and wastewater professionals that serve small communities across the United States. NRWA and the State Affiliates provide training on operator certification, financial sustainability, environmental compliance, utility management and governance to over 80,000 water professionals annually in all 50 states. Last year, over 55,000 on-site consultations were delivered by NRWA's technical experts for water quality, energy efficiency, source water protection, technical assistance and emergency response.