

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 14, 2026

The Honorable Lee Zeldin
EPA Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Administrator Zeldin,

We write regarding the ongoing wastewater infrastructure emergency in Haverhill, Massachusetts, and the broader national gaps in federal support for aging water systems. As communities across the Commonwealth continue recovering from the recent sewer main failure in Haverhill, it is increasingly clear that local governments, even those acting responsibly and proactively, cannot shoulder the costs of long-term infrastructure modernization without stronger, more reliable federal partnership.

On June 26, 2026, the City of Haverhill, Massachusetts experienced torrential rainfall and a main sewer line break that resulted in the discharge of untreated wastewater into the Merrimack River, one of Massachusetts' most important natural resources. Despite an emergency bypass, harmful bacteria continued to be detected downstream from Haverhill, forcing the closures of multiple beaches during a particularly hot Fourth of July weekend and halting shellfish operations for local businesses. This is a clear example of the immediate impacts that combined sewer overflows (CSOs) have on both community health and economic development. While this incident fortunately did not impact drinking water for communities along the Merrimack River, CSOs clearly pose a serious threat to public health. Additionally, communities with combined sewer systems have to operate under limited capacity to account for stormwater entering their systems. This constraint directly prevents new housing, commercial, and industrial development, ultimately slowing community growth and opportunity.

For nearly a decade, Haverhill has been working closely with the EPA under a 2016 consent decree that requires substantial upgrades to its sewer system and treatment plant. The City has acted in good faith, investing heavily in planning, engineering, and permitting to overhaul a decades-old system and reduce the risk of pollution and public health crises. However, despite the city's long-standing efforts to modernize its aging wastewater infrastructure, the lack of sustained federal investment has left the infrastructure still vulnerable to incidents like this.

As you well know, water infrastructure improvement projects are extraordinarily costly, with individual project phases often ranging from \$20–\$30 million. Emergency repairs alone require significant resources, while permanent replacement of aging mains, expanding treatment capacity, and completing sewer separation require tens of millions of dollars. Small cities like Haverhill simply do not have the financial capacity to absorb these costs. They instead are forced to rely on a patchwork of limited federal dollars, state loans, and strained local budgets to advance projects that are essential for long-term public health and economic development.

Federal programs designed to help communities undertake these improvements remain critically underfunded. The Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grant Program has seen modest increases since FY2019, but annual funding has remained essentially flatly funded at \$41 million in recent years. This bucket of money is then split across 50 states, bringing Massachusetts's federal CSO funding to around \$1 million every year. This is insufficient, especially considering the sheer number of cities and towns in the State with multi-million dollar water infrastructure projects. Even with efforts to secure Congressional community project funding, engage with multi-year planning with EPA officials, and ramp up State funding for these projects, cities like Haverhill require additional federal support to prevent future incidents.

Given the lack of robust grant funding, local governments increasingly rely on low-cost financing from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) for design and construction of wastewater infrastructure. Yet year after year, these accounts too face cuts or stagnation. In fact, the Trump administration's FY2027 budget request would cut water infrastructure funds by roughly 90%, dropping the CWSRF from about \$2.5 billion to just \$155 million. Due to the bureaucratic burden and tax base needed for loan repayment, even the low-interest SRF loans are simply not a viable replacement for consistent federal investment for many small, working-class communities. To protect public health and modernize aging systems, the federal government needs to evaluate the expansion of long-term investments in replacing water infrastructure, establishing rapid-response dollars and restoring robust grant funding.

Communities across the Merrimack watershed and around the country face aging infrastructure, increased storm intensity, and multi-year enforcement schedules with costs that far exceed available grant or loan support. As supplemental funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act closes out in 2026, greater and more consistent investment in water infrastructure is needed now more than ever. Underfunding these programs forces communities to defer essential repairs, leaving systems vulnerable to catastrophic public health failures like the one Haverhill just experienced. We urge you to work with our offices to identify long-term federal funding streams to ensure cities like Haverhill are not continually overburdened by the growing costs to replace aging water infrastructure.

We appreciate your urgent attention to this matter and stand ready to work collaboratively to secure the resources necessary to protect public health and prevent future crises.

Sincerely,



Lori Trahan
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress