

Written Statement of Gerald Iwan

Submitted to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies

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Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member Farr and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony to the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies. We are requesting an additional \$5 million appropriation above the Administration request for the FY 2016 USDA Technical Assistance and Training (TAT) Grants account under Title III, Utility Services, Water and Waste Disposal Programs. The recommended increase would elevate TAT funding, which has remained at \$19 million for the past 10 years, to a level that provides additional resources necessary to meet the current demands of small rural and disadvantaged communities nationwide for water and wastewater infrastructure technical assistance and training services.

Introduction

I am Gerald Iwan, and I represent the National Environmental Services Center (NESC), located at West Virginia University in Morgantown, West Virginia. Previously, I was for 20 years the drinking water administrator for the State of Connecticut Department of Public Health, during which time I oversaw the implementation of all regulatory aspects of the Safe Drinking Water Act. In my current assignment with NESC, I manage a unique program with nationally recognized expertise in drinking water, wastewater, and small community infrastructure security and emergency preparedness.

NESC has been providing access to an in-depth repository of information and specialized technical assistance and training services to small rural and disadvantaged communities for almost 35 years. For over 20 of those years, we have provided support to the USDA program in Rural Water and Wastewater Technical Assistance and Training (RWTAT) in our capacity as the National Drinking Water Clearinghouse (NDWC). The USDA program is designed to meet the technical and information needs of local officials, utility managers, and system operators in small and rural communities. Technical services are provided through: (1) toll-free telephone drinking water technical assistance; (2) publication of *On Tap*, an electronic magazine for small drinking water systems; (3) maintaining a comprehensive website [www.nesc.wvu.edu](http://www.nesc.wvu.edu) featuring water, wastewater, security, and emergency preparedness resources; and, (4) the use of social media face book and twitter accounts. The annual demand for our technical services includes visits to our website to view more than 3.5 million pages and to download over 1.6 million documents, including many of the 1200 free educational products we have available.

### Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Challenges

According to EPA, 147,000 small community water systems in the United States provide drinking water to communities of 3,300 people or less. These systems are mandated to comply with the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) in providing reliable and safe water services to their citizens. Small water systems typically have limited financial, human and equipment resources, and as a category, account for the majority of SDWA violations. The U.S Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Water and Wastewater Grants and Loans program may be the only option small systems have to obtain funding to address necessary system improvements. This program

has been successful in providing needed water infrastructure improvements in many rural communities. However, without reliable technical assistance, small water system operators may not be able to overcome the many challenges they face in complying with local, state and federal regulations.

Recognizing these challenges, in addition to its grants and loans program, the USDA also funds “Rural Water and Wastewater Technical Assistance and Training (RWTAT) Programs” through authorization in the *Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act* (the Farm Bill). The RWTAT programs help small and rural communities to identify and evaluate solutions to water or wastewater problems, improve facility operation and maintenance, and prepare funding applications for water or wastewater treatment facility construction projects. These programs are supported by competitive TAT grants awarded annually, for the above purposes.

Today there is an even greater need for RWTAT services due to previous stimulus and SRF funding in the water sector which has been directed to construction, with only a fraction of the money directed to necessary training in water and wastewater facility operation and maintenance. Small and rural communities need increased information and support from RWTAT providers to plan for and protect their current and future utility assets. Support for the RWTAT providers is provided through the Technical Assistance and Training Grants (TAT) account to assist our nation’s small, rural and disadvantaged communities.

## Request

Funding for the USDA Technical Assistance and Training (TAT) Grants account under Title III, Utility Services, Water and Waste Disposal Programs has remained static for over 10 years at \$19 million. Meanwhile the cost of technical assistance services and the demands for those services have increased. This leaves USDA with effectively less funding than necessary to allocate to competitively awarded TAT grants. Therefore, we are recommending that an additional \$5 million be appropriated to USDA's TAT account to provide adequate water and wastewater technical assistance and training services to our small rural and disadvantaged communities.