

[S. 611, Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems Assistance Act](#)

FLOOR SITUATION

On Monday, November 30, 2015, the House will consider [S. 611](#), *the Grassroots Rural and Small Community Water Systems Assistance Act*, under suspension of the rules. S. 611 was introduced on February 27, 2015 by Sen. Roger Wicker (R-MS) and passed the Senate by unanimous consent on June 9, 2015. The House Committee on Energy and Commerce ordered the bill reported by voice vote on November 18, 2015.

SUMMARY

S. 611 reauthorizes a Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) program that provides technical assistance to small public water systems to enable these systems to achieve and maintain compliance with applicable Federal drinking water regulations. The bill reauthorizes this program at \$15 million annually from fiscal years 2015 through 2020, the same as its most recent authorization.

The bill also adds several new program features, including:

- (1) Authorizing the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to grant this technical assistance to small public water systems through grants or cooperative agreements to non-profit organizations with a history of providing certain types of onsite technical assistance and training.
- (2) Requiring that EPA provide preference in awarding grants to or entering into cooperative agreements with non-profit organizations to those entities that the EPA determines are the most qualified and experienced in providing such training and assistance and that small public water systems find most beneficial and effective; and,
- (3) Prohibiting grants and cooperative agreements awarded under the program from being used to bring citizen suits under SDWA.

BACKGROUND

The smallest water systems (those serving fewer than 3,300 persons, many serving small clusters of homes) “account for seventy-seven percent of all systems and have a similarly high percentage of systems in significant noncompliance with drinking water regulations.”¹ These systems face significant challenges maintaining, replacing, or upgrading their drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. However, unlike their counterparts in larger urban markets, “these same small and rural communities do not have the rate base to fund the cost of some projects and still maintain affordable rates.”² Consequently, these small communities often rely on federal and state grants and subsidized loan programs to meet their needs in this area.

Section 1442(e) of the Safe Drinking Water Act “provides EPA authority to provide technical assistance to ‘small public water systems’ to enable these systems to achieve and maintain compliance with applicable federal drinking water regulations and to help small public water systems respond to environmental stressors, including through ‘circuit-rider and multi-state regional technical assistance programs, training, and preliminary engineering evaluations.’³

S. 611 reauthorizes and revises this program to ensure that small public water systems are able to comply with drinking water regulations issued by EPA under the SDWA, which are “a major source of financial stress”⁴ for such systems.

COST

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) [estimates](#) that implementing S. 611 would cost \$67 million over the next five years, assuming appropriation of the authorized amounts. Pay-as-you-go procedures do not apply to S. 611 because it would not affect direct spending or revenues.

STAFF CONTACT

For questions or further information please contact [Jerry White](#) with the House Republican Policy Committee by email or at 5-0190.

¹ [House Report 114-346](#) at 2.

² Id.

³ Id.

⁴ Id.