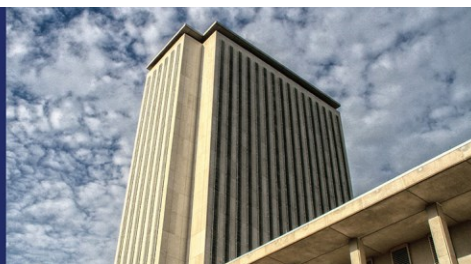




2018

Legislative
Issue
Briefs



Water Funding

Priority Statement:

The Florida League of Cities will SUPPORT legislation to provide long-term, recurring and adequate state funding, that is equitably distributed throughout the state, for local government water resource and water quality improvement projects and infrastructure, including, but not limited to, projects that: reduce nutrient and pollutant loading from wastewater sources; mitigate storm water and flooding impacts; and increase available water resources and supplies.

Background:

Florida's water quality and water supply challenges are myriad. Current conditions result from decades of pollution and overuse from multiple sources – urban, rural, agricultural, residential and industrial. All of these sources, their stakeholders, and their state and local governments, have a shared responsibility for addressing water supply, water quality and associated infrastructure problems. Resolution of these issues will require both long- and short-term strategies that are coordinated, are based on sound science, and make effective use of limited public funds and resources.

Florida's ability to meet the water needs of its growing population, industries and natural environment exceeds available supply and infrastructure. \$48.71 billion is estimated to be needed over the next 20 years to meet needs for drinking water and wastewater, flood control, nutrient pollution, Everglades restoration, and beach and inlet erosion. Some states have taken proactive steps to address similar challenge by creating financing and funding mechanisms, including Texas, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Illinois and California. Florida does not have a dedicated, long-term, recurring source of funding for water supply, water quality and associated infrastructure.

In 2005, the Florida Legislature took initial steps to establish a dedicated source of funding for water quality and water supply projects by creating and funding the Water Protection and Sustainability Program. Local funding matches and transparent grant criteria were hallmarks of the program. The program was funded with \$100 million in recurring revenues – an amount that represented less than 1% of the state's total budget. During the program's first three years, the state and water management districts contributed \$423 million for alternative water supply development, that funded 344 local projects. These projects were anticipated to generate 842 million gallons of new water per day. Unfortunately, the program was drastically cut in 2008, and funding to the trust fund was eliminated in 2009.

Other than the brief success of 2005's SB 444, Florida's history of water project and infrastructure funding has been one of band-aids and crisis management. Dying springs and algae-choked estuaries prompted the passage of SB 552 and HB 989 in 2016. Among other things, these bills required septic tank remediation plans for certain spring sheds and provided dedicated percentages of Amendment 1 money for the benefit of the Everglades and surrounding estuaries, Lake Apopka and springs. Continued algae blooms in South Florida estuaries prompted passage of SB 10 in 2017, which

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provided a \$1.5 billion plan for water storage needed to combat nutrient pollution in these areas. These bills were critically needed, but problems persist throughout the state and continue to grow.

The extent and nature of the state's water and infrastructure problems vary among regions and communities. For some local governments, their most acute need is finding resources to mitigate nutrient pollution from septic tanks. Others are desperately seeking ways to increase available water supply through the creation of alternative water supplies, including reuse of reclaimed water. Still others grapple with the enormity of retrofitting their community against increasing tidal and storm flooding.

These challenges are growing exponentially, and cannot be shouldered by one or even a few governments or stakeholders. It is pointless to assign "blame" for these growing challenges because it is shared by everyone who uses Florida's water and infrastructure resources – businesses, residents, visitors and industries. It is time for Florida's state and local governments, residents, industry, and water stakeholders to collaborate on shared solutions that meet Florida's water and infrastructure challenges comprehensively, equitably and for the long term.

Status:

The Legislature has no interest in creating a statewide, recurring source of water funding for the 2018 session. Projected state budget shortfalls for the next three fiscal years will make it difficult to fund existing programs, and legislators are wary of creating new programs that will add to these budget challenges. While a statewide funding source may be off the table for 2018, some legislators are laying the groundwork for future policy makers. For example, SB 1620 (Book) would establish a task force to evaluate funding mechanisms and strategies to ensure clean water for future generations. The bill specifies the structural composition of the task force, and would include the Florida League of Cities as a member of said task force. SB 1620 also directs the task force to submit a report and recommendations to the legislature by December 2019. SB 1620 has not yet been referred to any committees.

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