

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 18th, 2018

Mr. Akinbode Oluwafemi
Environmental Rights Action / Friends of the Earth Nigeria
Plot 397B, George Crescent
Agbalajobi Estate
Off Wempco Road
Ogba-Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria

Dear Akinbode Oluwafemi and members of the “Our Water, Our Right” Coalition,

We, members of the Congressional Black Caucus and Congressional Progressive Caucus signed below, continue to stand with you and our brothers and sisters in communities across the United States, the African continent, and the world as we struggle together to achieve the universal human right to clean, safe drinking water.

Thank you for bringing to our attention developments since our 2015 communication about the situation in Lagos, Nigeria, where a mere fraction of the city’s roughly 21 million people have regular access to safe water. Water is a fundamental human right and building block upon which individual and collective economic prosperity relies. When people cannot access or afford clean water, the impact on their health and livelihoods is devastating. As you know all too well, these circumstances force families to make painful economic choices.

Unfortunately, water access is a problem that transcends national boundaries. In the U.S. city of Detroit, low-income residents continue to experience inhumane water shutoffs, a development that has drawn the concern of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation. In Flint, nearly 100,000 people are still dealing with the effects of being poisoned by contaminated water, and are demanding infrastructure repair and health services. In Pittsburgh, people are facing elevated lead levels and working to ensure their water is safe, affordable and publicly-controlled. In both Pittsburgh and Flint, people are fighting for democratic control of their water systems: organizing against privatization in Pittsburgh, rebuilding from the devastating legacy of emergency management in Flint, and holding the global water corporation, Veolia, accountable for its role in the public health crises in both of these cities. At the root of the water crisis in the U.S. is a failure to invest in our precious public water infrastructure, which is an important foundation for achieving the human right to water. And as you know personally, the people of Lagos are facing the possibility that their water services will also be privatized.

We are deeply concerned that low-income communities, African Americans and other people of color, and people in the Global South are disproportionately affected when water is managed with greater attention to profits and finances than to human rights. Time and time again we have seen this practice result in abuses in the most vulnerable communities, whether through neglect and failure to invest in public infrastructure, or through outright privatization. While we cannot all be experts on the distinct water access challenges facing each of the world’s cities, we share

your concerns that a move towards privatization of the water system in Lagos, including through public-private partnerships, could leave the city vulnerable to the negative impacts historically associated with various forms of water privatization, including rate hikes, unaffordable service, inequitable access, worker layoffs, service interruptions, and failures to adequately invest in infrastructure. Privatization also introduces significant governance challenges that can erode democratic control and oversight, including the government's ability to regulate in the public interest.

Protecting this public good requires transparency, democratic decision-making, and strong public participation, particularly when governments consider contracting private, for-profit entities for water delivery and management. It is in this spirit that we wish to express our solidarity with the people of Lagos, Detroit, Flint, Pittsburgh, and cities around the world as they raise their voices in support of public water, participatory governance, and universal access. Movements like yours provide us with an inspiring example of democracy in action and a valuable contribution to the struggle to secure the human right to water.

We also wish to demonstrate our support for governments exercising leadership, courage, and political will to stand up to powerful interests and make the strong public investments in water infrastructure that have proven successful in the past. It is our hope that we can continue working together to ensure that all people enjoy their fundamental human right to water.

Sincerely,



Keith Ellison
Member of Congress



Karen Bass
Member of Congress



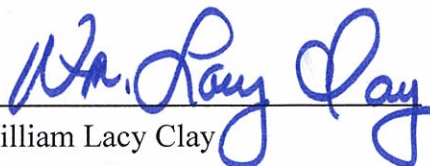
Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



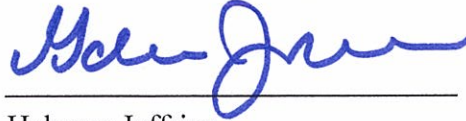
Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress



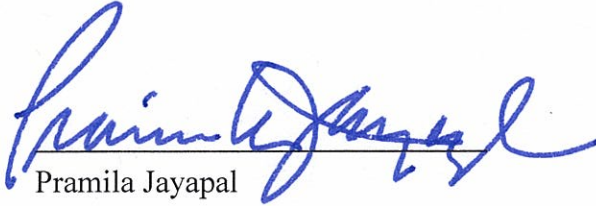
William Lacy Clay
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Hakeem Jeffries
Member of Congress



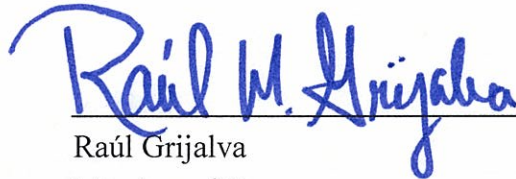
Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



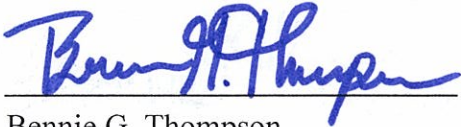
Brenda Lawrence
Member of Congress



Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress



Raúl Grijalva
Member of Congress



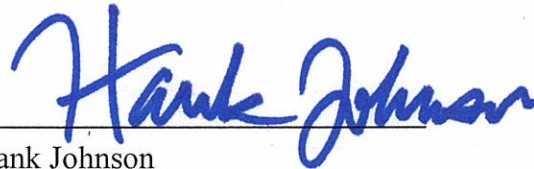
Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress




Donald Payne
Member of Congress




Stacey Plaskett
Member of Congress



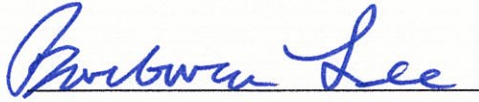
Hank Johnson
Member of Congress



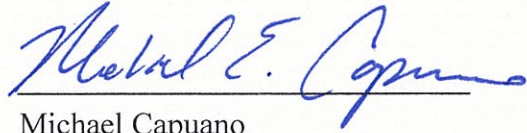
Gwen Moore
Member of Congress



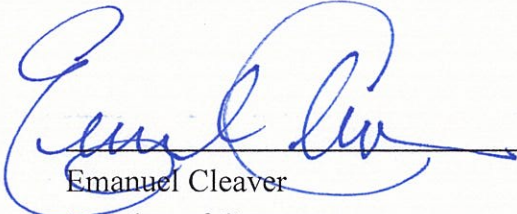
José E. Serrano
Member of Congress



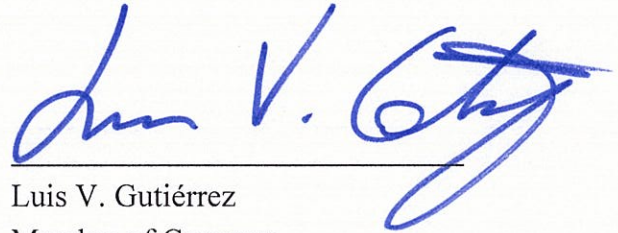
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



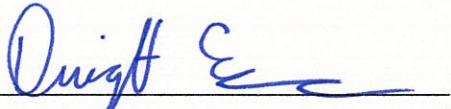
Michael Capuano
Member of Congress



Emanuel Cleaver
Member of Congress



Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress



Dwight Evans
Member of Congress