



SEWAGE FREE STREETS AND RIVERS

Your Waterways, Your Neighborhood, Your Money, Your Voice

www.sewagefreenj.org

info@sewagefree.org

April 24, 2023

To: New Jersey Senate Budget Committee

RE: Fiscal Year 2024 Senate Budget Hearing Testimony

Submitted by: Suzanne Aptman, Program Manager, Sewage-Free Streets and Rivers

Saptman@NJFuture.org; 917-825 5538

New Jersey has 21 communities with combined sewer systems. In these communities, any stormwater that is collected during a rain event will join municipal sewage in its path to a sewage/wastewater treatment plant. Treatment plants are unable to handle flows that are more than twice the design capacity. When this occurs, a mix of stormwater and untreated sewage discharges (called a combined sewer overflow) directly into waterways, as well as causing backups into basements and streets. Annually, 24 billion gallons of untreated raw sewage ends up in New Jersey's rivers, with the problem expected to worsen as climate change and precipitation volumes continue to increase.

In November 2022, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) approved the allocation of \$300 million of American Rescue Plan Act funding with \$248 million of this used to address combined sewer overflow (CSO) issues. However, estimates show that the solutions and implementation needed to address CSOs in New Jersey will cost \$2.6 billion. Given anticipated increased burden on water infrastructure and construction costs, and the fact that problems caused by combined sewer systems commonly present themselves in overburdened communities, more funds ought to be allocated to improve these CSS and CSO systems.

The NJDEP is currently engaging with these municipalities and wastewater treatment plants to finalize their long term control plans (LTCPs) to reduce the impacts of CSOs on water quality and related flooding. These plans and the associated CSO permits are an opportunity to develop stronger requirements and standards. According to the LTCPs, the time frames for achieving CSO volume reductions vary anywhere from 10 to 20+ years. It is critical that these plans are implemented in a

shorter timeframe so these communities are not left bearing an extended burden to environmental and public health. The accelerated time frame must also ensure affordability for ratepayers, especially in low-income households.

At recent hearings on the topic with NJDEP, Don Stizenberg, president, Hudson River Waterfront Conservancy shared, *"Any plan that has a 24-year timeframe to improve Hudson River water quality is unacceptable. So much will happen in the next 20-plus years in technology, governance, cost projections and climate that any relevance... will be lost."*

Peter Farley, a Hudson River kayaker and Hoboken community member commented, "The Hudson River has rebounded with time, including sea bass and dolphin sightings. So why would the permit not take every immediate action possible to further that renewal instead of a quarter-century-long plan with questionable end results?"

A Sewage-Free Streets and Rivers partner organization member shared, *"Adequate funding must be available to municipalities to clean all sewers on a regular basis in order to maximize wet weather storage and conveyance and regular NJDEP enforcement to ensure the cleaning is occurring regularly."*

NJDEP should ensure that CSO permit holders and municipalities are accessing the Water Bank funding as a way to shorten timelines, accelerate implementation of CSO and sewage backup solutions, and ensure affordability for low-income ratepayers. NJDEP should work with the Environmental Protection Agency and permit holders to leverage the EPA's **2023 Clean Water Act Financial Capability Assessment Guidance**, which recommends options for mitigating financial impacts of potential rate increases on low-income households while still shortening implementation timelines. The state should also ensure that NJDEP has an appropriate number of staff working on CSO issues and permits to accelerate Long Term Control Plan finalization and implementation, and to ensure the proper monitoring and enforcement is in place as the projects are rolled out.

Again, as the stakes are high, and the gap in funding is quite substantial, New Jersey should use this year's budget cycle to allocate more funding to CSO impacted municipalities and permit holders to close this gap and accelerate implementation of solutions.