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**Testimony on  
New Jersey Water Infrastructure Center (S-294)  
Senate Environment and Energy Committee**

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**Contact: Chris Sturm, Senior Advisor ([csturm@njfuture.org](mailto:csturm@njfuture.org))  
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Dear Chair Smith and members of the Committee,

New Jersey Future is a nonprofit organization that believes New Jersey can be a great place to live with a prosperous, fair economy; thriving communities; and a healthy environment if smart decisions are made about what and where to build and the supporting infrastructure. That's why we promote policies for cost-effective, sustainable water systems in New Jersey.

**We urge you to pass [S294](#) to provide for the establishment of a New Jersey Water Infrastructure Center at an institute of higher education** designated by the DEP and appropriate \$5 million. We also understand that a complementary budget resolution could fund creation of the water center.

The timing could not be more fortuitous. **Recent developments position New Jersey to turn the corner** on its water challenges and become a national water leader:

- New federal water infrastructure spending and dedicated state funding offer a generational opportunity to jumpstart not only new projects but a new way of doing business.
- Major water investments will begin soon as combined sewer overflow plans are approved (\$2.6B), and lead service line replacement (\$2.3B) and PFA remediation (\$.5 - \$1B) begin.
- The Water Quality Accountability Act (amended in 2021) is ensuring more proactive utility investments, reporting of performance metrics, and enforcement.
- Consumers, utilities, and regulators just gained easy access to information on 550 drinking water and wastewater systems through a new data dashboard, [Jersey WaterCheck](#).

**What New Jersey needs now is a water infrastructure center** that brings together data, applied research, and cross-disciplinary stakeholders to accelerate infrastructure policy and utility solutions and connect all water stakeholders—consumers, utilities, regulators, and advocates—to easily accessible water metrics.

A water infrastructure center would deliver services such as the following:

- **Applied research** - Provide cross-disciplinary research and cutting-edge, data-driven solutions for state-level policy development and utility program design.
- **Connections** - Engage and connect the university community with water practitioners, planners, decision-makers, and thought leaders in order to develop new local water strategies.
- **Performance metrics** - An accessible, up-to-date data dashboard that builds on [Jersey WaterCheck](#) to provide benchmarking data on water and sewer systems, provide regulators with state-wide trends, and make it easy for residents to connect with their water systems.
- **Technical assistance** - Help at-risk water systems implement cost-saving strategies, such as regionalization, climate resiliency, water-energy nexus approaches, and staff capacity building.
- **Education and collaboration** - Newsletter and convenings that foster dialogue based on the above.
- **Water workforce** - Act as a bridge between utilities and educational institutions to form water workforce training programs that create employment pipelines from host communities into utilities.

Creation of a state water center would add to your legacy and help communities across New Jersey turn the corner on their water challenges. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.