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June 30, 2021

The Honorable Michelle Steel
 U.S. House of Representatives
 1113 Longworth House Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Steel:

On behalf of the Orange County Sanitation District (OC San), I write to request that you co-sponsor Representative Alan Lowenthal’s Wastewater Infrastructure Pollution Prevention and Environmental (WIPPES) Safety Act that would help to protect our nation’s clean water treatment infrastructure investments.

OC San provides wastewater collection, treatment, and recycling for approximately 2.6 million people in central and northwest Orange County, CA. OC San’s primary mission is to protect public health and the environment through its services. As the regional wastewater provider in north and central Orange County, we have firsthand knowledge of the unique treatment and management challenges and pollution threats to our water supplies. This includes the flushing of non-flushable wet wipes. Many wet wipes are made from plastic which makes them not compatible with sewer systems and infrastructure. Improperly flushing these incredibly durable products results in their getting caught in pipes or accumulating with fats, oils, and grease and becoming larger obstructions that cause costly backups and sometimes result in raw sewage overflows in our streets that can lead to our waterways.

Further down the sewer line, wipes tend to weave together and create giant rags which get stuck in pump systems and motors and damage expensive public infrastructure. Additionally, environmental harm can come from flushing wipes since they shed microplastics into the wastewater system that can ultimately be discharged to the aquatic environment.

The WIPPES Act would address this unique problem in a straightforward and reasonable approach, by establishing “Do Not Flush” labeling requirements for non-flushable wet wipes product packaging. Importantly, this legislation would not create unnecessary burdensome regulation because the labeling would be restricted to wipes products that are not designed, nor intended to be disposed of through the sewer system. The legislation takes a critical step in stopping the flushing of wet wipes at the source and, as a result, decrease the strains that the flushing of these products have upon property owners, infrastructure, ratepayers, and the surrounding environment.

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Representative Steel

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Thank you for your support for the clean water sector and to developing solutions that enhance clean water infrastructure. Again, we ask that you become an original co-sponsor of the WIPPES Act. Please do not hesitate to contact Jennifer Cabral, OC San Administration Manager at (714) 593-7581 or via email at JCabral@ocsan.gov should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'David John Shawver'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping 'D' and 'S'.

David John Shawver
Board Chairman