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Governor Maura Healey
Massachusetts State House
Office of the Governor, Room 280
24 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02133
Via [online contact form](#)

Re: Comments on Combined Sewer Overflow Long-Term Control Plan Approved by
MWRA Board

March 3, 2026

Dear Governor Healey,

On behalf of the Charles River Conservancy and the residents, businesses, and visitors who cherish the Charles, I urge you to reject the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) Long-Term Control Plan approved by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) on February 25, 2026. This plan would allow sewage discharges into the Charles River for generations to come, at the very moment when we have both the tools and the public will to virtually eliminate them.

Massachusetts has set ambitious goals for [environmental protection and climate leadership](#), and your administration has articulated a vision in which healthy ecosystems, resilient infrastructure, and thriving communities go hand in hand. Allowing continued CSO discharges into the Charles is fundamentally out of step with that vision. Not only does raw sewage released in waterways [make people sick](#), it also undermines the state's [biodiversity goals](#) by degrading critical aquatic habitat. Furthermore, it is at odds with the spirit and intent of the EPA [Clean Water Act](#) and the [Charles River Initiative](#), which has held up a swimmable, fishable Charles as the goal and standard.

Massachusetts' decisions made now that impact water quality for generations down the line is a tremendous test of our commitment to that standard. The MWRA's own analysis shows that, for less than four dollars per household per month, we could pursue the strongest level of CSO control—a plan that achieves zero CSO discharges in a 2050 25-year, 24-hour design storm. This approach would align Boston with the leading edge of global [swimmable cities](#)—including [Paris](#), [New York](#), and [Portland](#)—that have demonstrated what is possible when clean water is treated as an essential public right. Beyond its direct environmental benefits, resilient water infrastructure delivers a strong return on investment by reducing remediation costs, improving health outcomes, and strengthening regional competitiveness in tourism and business.

We are deeply concerned that the Charles will continue to be treated as a literal release valve whenever intense storms hit. We witnessed this in July 2025, when our at-capacity [City Splash river swim on the Esplanade](#) had to be canceled because of bacterial contamination following CSO discharges days earlier. Last fall's [serious cyanobacteria bloom in the Lower Charles](#) led to an extended advisory that nearly jeopardized the Head of the Charles Regatta, one of the region's premier economic and cultural events. Following heavy storms, the public is now accustomed to "[red flag](#)" days when boaters are warned to stay out of the water. These are tangible, lived consequences for public health, constituent quality of life, and the local economy.

Spending hundreds of millions of dollars to tear up streets, construct major facilities, and disrupt neighborhoods—only to build a system that is still designed to dump sewage during heavy storms—is neither fiscally responsible nor worthy of Massachusetts' reputation as a world-class environmental leader. Once undersized tanks and tunnels are built, they are difficult and costly to retrofit.

We have a rare “do it once, do it right” opportunity. The plan approved by the MWRA Board does not seize it.

As an organization, we are committed to a constructive, collaborative approach. We stand alongside partners like the Charles River Watershed Association, Mystic River Watershed Association, and Save the Alewife Brook in calling for the strongest level of CSO control. Our role is to help bridge the gap—to work with agencies, municipalities, and residents to identify solutions that are both ambitious and achievable, and to build the public support necessary to implement them.

We therefore respectfully ask you to:

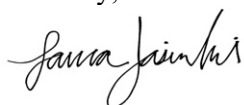
1. Challenge the assumption that the MWRA-approved CSO plan for the Charles River, Mystic River, and Alewife Brook is sufficient to meet Massachusetts' public health, biodiversity, and climate goals.
2. Direct your administration to withhold support for any plan that does not achieve zero CSO discharges in a 2050 25-year, 24-hour design storm.
3. Encourage the MWRA and its member communities to advance a more robust, long-term plan that combines regional sewer separation, a modern CSO storage tunnel where appropriate, green stormwater infrastructure, and targeted river and wetland restoration.

Such a plan would not only honor the Clean Water Act's fundamental promise of swimmable, fishable rivers, it would also advance your administration's biodiversity and climate objectives. These investments will pay dividends in preventable health costs, increased recreational use, higher adjacent property values, and a more attractive environment for businesses and talent choosing to locate (or remain) in Massachusetts.

We also see a tremendous opportunity for the MWRA to reclaim its role as a national model. The Boston Harbor cleanup showed the world what is possible when bold vision, sound engineering, and sustained public investment align. We urge you to call on the MWRA to “be the hero” to design and implement a world-class, climate-resilient system that virtually eliminates sewage discharges to the Charles River, Mystic River, and Alewife Brook, and that ratepayers can take pride in funding as a legacy.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to a healthier, more resilient Massachusetts.

Sincerely,



Laura Jasinski
Executive Director
Charles River Conservancy