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## STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

US WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) Collective

Today, more than 2.2 million Americans live without access to basic water or wastewater services. Children and adults across the United States are forced to haul water for miles, flush sewage into local streams or their yards, and face staggering challenges to health, wealth, and well-being. Communities of color are significantly more likely to face water and sanitation inaccessibility, with Indigenous households 19 times more likely, and Black and Latinx households twice as likely than white homes to lack basic safe water access and adequate plumbing. This is the **water access gap** — a growing crisis in which millions of people living in one of the wealthiest countries on Earth struggle every day to meet their basic needs.

As it stands, the United States is not on track to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 6, which ensures the "availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all." In addition to communities living without taps and toilets, tens-of-millions more people face affordability or quality issues that make it impossible for them to rely on their water. US-based WASH organizations have an important role to play in the promotion of universal access to reliable, sustainable, and safe water and wastewater services, both abroad and in our own communities.

As leaders in this space, we know we will not close the water access gap until US WASH organizations work together as a unified force for change. We recognize the scope of this challenge; we are deeply connected to impacted communities; and we believe that together, as a coalition, we can solve this crisis in our lifetimes.

As a collective, we commit to the following sector priorities:

### **1. DEVELOP SOLUTIONS WITH IMPACTED COMMUNITIES.**

As organizations across the public, private, nonprofit, utility, academic, and philanthropic sectors, we commit to collaboratively engaging with impacted communities, empowering them to lead this effort. Often, those most impacted by a lack of access to water and sanitation do not have a voice at the table. Therefore, we will partner with communities to develop solutions and uplift a diverse and inclusive array of perspectives in decision-making processes around water and wastewater access.

We understand that sustainable solutions also require social, government, and regulatory support, and increased interaction between impacted communities and these decision-makers is key to success.

## **2. RAISE AWARENESS AND MOTIVATE CHANGE.**

For many, the water and wastewater access crisis in the US remains invisible. Therefore, we commit to raising awareness among the public, policymakers, and other key players in the private sector, academia, and NGO/nonprofit spaces. This includes developing cohesive messaging as a sector, and sounding the alarm on the need for more accurate data on the water access gap, responding to water and sanitation emergencies as they arise, and advocating for vulnerable groups. We recognize that the government has a primary role to play in guaranteeing access to WASH, and therefore, we commit to thoughtful advocacy at local, state, and federal levels.

## **3. SUPPORT AND ADVOCATE FOR THE COLLECTION OF COMPREHENSIVE, ACTIONABLE DATA & INFORMATION.**

While we have developed some conservative estimates of the size and scope of the water access gap, we do not know the full scale of the problems across the country, including in Tribes and Indigenous communities, and US territories. We cannot effectively manage what we do not measure; therefore, we will collect and share both quantitative and qualitative data and decision-making tools in order to more accurately understand the issue and respond to it. This includes valuing and including local and Indigenous knowledges and observations whenever possible. We will also collectively advocate for better data by state and federal agencies, and search for ways to gather and harmonize existing data, making it easier to use.

## **4. CHALLENGE TRADITIONAL CONCEPTIONS OF WASH.**

The health and vitality of the WASH sector is tied to that of many other humanitarian endeavors including environmental protection, nutrition and health, and economic stability, among others. Therefore we commit to working across sectors, not only to further our work on the ground, but to demonstrate the foundational necessity of safe water and sanitation services so that they remain top of mind for policymakers and the public.

## 5. ADVANCE PARTNERSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER.

As a US WASH sector, our work is more effective when we coordinate our efforts. This requires meeting regularly to set strategy, share data and information, and evaluate best practices. As US WASH organizations, we will leverage our relationships and knowledge for the benefit of each other and the communities we serve collectively. Therefore, we will work in a spirit of collaboration across programs, research projects, advocacy efforts, and communication strategies, starting with an annual convening to serve as a basis for our collective efforts.

Our organizations commit to planning and attending future convenings of the domestic WASH sector, and extending invitations to other vital partners within our communities of expertise.

As a coalition, we commit to collective action and continued progress in achieving these goals. This includes the periodic review and examination of our shared work. As duty bearers, we will continue to move these priorities forward, and invite others to share these goals.

Signed:

