WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Thad Cochran (R-Miss.) today announced his support for legislation that would direct the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to help small communities meet clean water standards rather than impose fines for noncompliance.

The “Small System Safe Drinking Water Act (S.999)” was introduced Monday by Senator James Inhofe (R-Okla.), the ranking member on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. Cochran is among the original cosponsors of the bill.

Small towns generally operate on small budgets, and the costs for complying with environmental regulations can lead to adversarial situations that do not benefit anyone. This legislation is an attempt to improve that relationship by directing the Environmental Protection Agency to be more of a partner to ensure that rural residents can enjoy affordable and safe water services,” Cochran said.

The legislation is intended to assist water systems that serve fewer than 10,000 individuals and that demonstrate financial hardship which results in noncompliance. It directs the EPA to provide technical assistance and training to help these systems comply with federal drinking water standards. Small communities would be given priority assistance for disinfectant byproducts and arsenic regulations, as well as other regulations promulgated by the EPA after the bill is enacted. It would authorize $75.0 million over five years to aid small water systems.

The Inhofe measure also directs the EPA to develop an affordability criterion that more accurately assesses the per capita cost impact of its regulations on low-income households.

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