

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:

AGING

AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION,
AND FORESTRY

BANKING

FINANCE

July 23, 2026

The Honorable Lee Zeldin
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Zeldin:

I write to express concern over the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) continued lack of support for public water systems and communities in Georgia as they navigate new water resource challenges posed by the rapid development of resource-intensive data centers. As the nation's chief regulator responsible for ensuring the availability of safe and clean drinking water across the country, you have a solemn responsibility to ensure data centers are not sacrificing community water supplies under the guise of economic development. Under your leadership, however, the EPA has largely remained on the sidelines, leaving small and often under-resourced communities on their own as they negotiate on behalf of families against giant corporations seeking access to millions of gallons of community water resources per day to support the proliferation of data centers. I urge you to change course and immediately issue guidance and best practices to local communities on how to best protect the long-term availability of safe and clean water for ordinary people amid the explosion of data center construction.

Georgia has quickly become one of the nation's largest data center hubs, with between 200 and 230 facilities already located across the state.¹ Every estimate suggests this growth is set to continue.² On July 22, 2026, OpenAI announced plans for a new data center in Effingham County that will require 3,200 megawatts of power, or over 66 percent of Plant Vogtle's entire generating capacity.³ As new data centers are built, they place new demands on Georgia's limited water resources. Meanwhile, the entire state has been engulfed in a historic drought, with

¹ Yang You, *Georgia Data Center Ordinance Hub*, Energy Policy and Innovation Center at Georgia Tech, <https://epicenter.energy.gatech.edu/data-center> (last visited Jul. 23, 2026); *USA Data Centers*, Data Center Map, <https://www.datacentermap.com/usa> (last visited Jul. 23, 2026).

² See, e.g., Andrew Foote and Caelan Wilkie-Rogers, *Data Centers Growing Fast and Reshaping Local Economies*, U.S. Census Bureau (Jan. 6, 2025), <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2025/01/data-centers.html>; *US Data Center Power Demand Projected to Double by 2027*, Goldman Sachs (May 20, 2026), <https://www.goldmansachs.com/insights/articles/us-data-center-power-demand-projected-to-double-by-2027>; *DOE Releases New Report Evaluating Increase in Electricity Demand from Data Centers*, U.S. Department of Energy (Dec. 20, 2024), <https://www.energy.gov/articles/doe-releases-new-report-evaluating-increase-electricity-demand-data-centers>.

³ Summer Swanson, Cam McCann, and Steven Glover, *OpenAI Announces Plans for a New Data Center Campus in Effingham County*, WTOC (Jul. 22, 2026), <https://www.wtoc.com/2026/07/22/openai-announces-plans-new-data-center-effingham-county>; *Plant Vogtle: Alvin W. Vogtle Electric Generating Plant*, Southern Nuclear, <https://www.southernnuclear.com/our-plants/plant-vogtle.html> (last visited Jul. 23, 2026).

100 percent of Georgians experiencing severe to exceptional drought earlier this year for the first time in recorded history.⁴

Alarming, some of these data centers have made unreasonable demands for water, pitting large corporations against under-resourced, often rural communities that, quite reasonably, want to promote economic development. One data center in Georgia went so far as to request 9 million gallons of water per day, enough to supply nearly 44,000 households or the entire population of the cities of Albany and Rome, Georgia combined.⁵

Thankfully, the local community had the foresight and resources to negotiate this data center's water withdrawals down to 300,000 gallons per day.⁶ Meanwhile, in Fayetteville, Georgia, a data center managed to use nearly 30 million gallons of water without paying for it, in part because it installed a water hookup without the knowledge of the local utility.⁷ One reason this data center managed to almost escape a \$150,000 bill was because the local community was unaccustomed to large commercial projects of this nature,⁸ though the same cannot be said of the data center developer, which is owned by a private equity company and has revenues in the hundreds of millions.⁹

The influx of data centers in Georgia during a record drought has been met with fierce skepticism across the state. Twenty-four cities and counties, ranging from urban DeKalb, Cobb, and Clayton to rural Monroe, Crawford, and Gordon, have adopted data center moratoria.¹⁰ Just south of Atlanta, residents in Coweta County are fighting to become only the third county in Georgia history to stage a referendum, this time in an effort to block the construction of a more than 800-acre data center campus.¹¹ The reaction to the expansion of data centers in Georgia mirrors the rest of the country. Over 70 percent of Americans oppose the construction of data

⁴ Sam Daniel, *Georgia Drought: 100% of State Hits Historic Dry Levels*, FOX 5 Atlanta (Apr. 30, 2026), <https://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/georgia-remains-drought-despite-recent-rainfall>.

⁵ This calculation is based on the average American using 82 gallons of water per day and an average household size of 2.5 people. *Statistics and Facts*, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, <https://www.epa.gov/watersense/statistics-and-facts> (last updated Mar. 11, 2026); *Households by Size: 1960 to Present*, U.S. Census Bureau (Dec. 2025), <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/families/time-series/households/hh4.xls>; *2020 Census Count by Georgia City Population*, Georgia General Assembly (Aug. 12, 2021), <https://www.legis.ga.gov/api/document/docs/default-source/reapportionment-document-library/2020-census-count-by-city-population.pdf> at 1.

⁶ *Coweta Residents Frustrated After Project Sail Open House*, Newnan Times-Herald (Jan. 30, 2026), https://www.times-herald.com/news/coweta-residents-frustrated-after-project-sail-open-house/article_9ee70cdf-a6e3-45d6-959d-ad4b4dcc31d7.html.

⁷ Arianna Skibell, *A Data Center Drained 30M Gallons of Water Unnoticed — Until Residents Complained About Low Water Pressure*, Politico (May 9, 2026), <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/05/08/georgia-data-centers-water-00909988>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *QTS Realty Trust to Be Acquired by Blackstone Funds in \$10 Billion Transaction*, Blackstone (Jun. 7, 2021), <https://www.blackstone.com/news/press/qts-realty-trust-to-be-acquired-by-blackstone-funds-in-10-billion-transaction>.

¹⁰ Yang You, *Data Center Moratoria in Georgia*, Energy Policy and Innovation Center at Georgia Tech, <https://epicenter.energy.gatech.edu/data-center/#Moratoria> (last visited Jul. 23, 2026).

¹¹ Timothy Pratt, *A Georgia Datacenter Threatens Local Rivers. Residents Are Joining a National Push to Stop It*, Guardian (Jun. 14, 2026), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jun/14/coweta-county-georgia-datacenter>.

centers in their area, and many cite a data center's strain on water and energy resources as a top concern.¹²

Despite these overwhelming and urgent water concerns, the EPA has, at best, largely stood on the sidelines. Instead of focusing on its statutory mandate to ensure the availability of safe and clean drinking water by working closely with local communities to ensure the proliferation of data centers has not introduced new contaminants, stressors, or challenges for community water systems, the EPA has partnered with data center developers to issue guidance and regulations to help these large corporations avoid federal regulatory scrutiny.¹³

As a result, small, rural communities have been left to negotiate on their own with multi-million-dollar corporations whose well-staffed legal teams may negotiate dozens of deals at a time. This pits communities against one another in a race to the bottom that ultimately may harm families.

It is past time for the EPA to stand up on the side of our families, communities, and local municipalities as they navigate this new landscape. I urge the EPA to immediately rectify this failure by collaborating with local governments, water utilities and planning organizations, data center developers, and other interested parties to publish best practices and other resources to help communities protect and preserve the nation's water supplies while also enabling sustainable, long-term economic development. These resources should include recommended best practices to reduce or minimize data centers' water consumption and maintain water quality during construction and operation.

In addition to a written response to this letter, please provide an in-person briefing on your progress to publish these resources to my office no later than four weeks after receipt of this letter.

Sincerely,



Reverend Raphael Warnock
United States Senator

¹² Jeffrey M. Jones, *Americans Oppose AI Data Centers in Their Area*, Gallup (May 13, 2026), <https://news.gallup.com/poll/709772/americans-oppose-data-centers-area.aspx>.

¹³ *Clean Air Act Resources for Data Centers*, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, <https://www.epa.gov/stationary-sources-air-pollution/clean-air-act-resources-data-centers> (last updated Jul. 17, 2026); *EPA Hosts Roundtable Discussion with Data Center Coalition on Clean Air Resources and Energy Reliability*, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (Jan. 23, 2026), <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-hosts-roundtable-discussion-data-center-coalition-clean-air-resources-and-energy> (stating that the “EPA will also be announcing permitting reform to cut burdensome red tape in the near future.”).