



ATTN: Matthew Phillips
Detroit Water and Sewerage Department
Board of Water Commissioners
Customer Service Committee
735 Randolph St.
Detroit, Michigan 48226

RE: Lifeline Termination; Lifeline H2O Enrollment

December 10, 2025

Dear Matthew Phillips:

I am writing to relay concerns that have been raised by many Detroiters – regarding their water service. Detroit Water and Sewerage Department customers who were enrolled in the Lifeline Water Assistance Plan which launched on August 1, 2022, and ended on September 30, 2025, are extremely concerned – most are fearful – that they will lose their water service due to an inability to afford their unexpectedly expensive water bills. In October and November, low-income DWSD customers who had been paying an \$18-dollar water bill for years abruptly received bills without their usual Lifeline designation and lower monthly rate. Many of the families we spoke with have yet to receive notice that their Lifeline plan benefits have ended.

During the November Board of Water Commissioners meeting (held on Wednesday, November 19, 2025), we learned that the 8,136 former Lifeline customers were sent notices on Tuesday, November 18, 2025 instructing them to apply for one of the limited 5,000 opportunities to enroll in the new Lifeline H2O Plan – which launched October 1, 2025 with no application process, plan, or notice to customers. Customers are unsure of what to expect and who to turn to for help. Customers are calling the former Lifeline plan administrator, Wayne Metro. Wayne Metro advises customers to call DWSD. And DWSD is sending customers to the Lifeline H2O plan administrator, Promise Network – a debt collector.

The transfer from Lifeline to Lifeline H2O has been grossly mishandled, leaving Detroit residents to navigate confusion and uncertainty alone. **While categorical eligibility offers some**

ease for customers who are enrolled in low-income programs, how will other customers' income be verified? Does Promise Network possess the computational software, knowledge, and sensitivity to determine income eligibility?

The need for water affordability is great in Detroit, with about 60,000 low-income customers who are eligible for an income-based water bill. At its height, the Lifeline plan enrolled nearly 30,000 customers, which was reduced by over 70% in October of 2024 to just over 8,000 customers. The Lifeline H2O plan will see another reduction of about 40% of the households who were previously enrolled in the Lifeline plan.

The Lifeline H2O plan requires customers to be current on their bills as a stipulation for eligibility. However, since September 30, 2025, customers have been receiving their full water bills. **What will happen to former Lifeline customers who have accumulated arrears due to surprise, unaffordable bills at the termination of the program? Will they be required to pay their arrears accumulated since October 1 to enroll in Lifeline H2O?**

Transparency and clarity of information are imperative for DWSD customers who participate in the Lifeline H2O program. While the Lifeline H2O program has capacity to service only a fraction of the low-income households who have a demonstrated need, it should be a lifeline for those residents to maintain their access to water. We look forward to learning more about the Lifeline H2O program to better support our community.

In commitment to building the Beloved Community,



Cecily McClellan,
Director of Water Works

CC: Board of Water Commissioners

Gary Brown, Director, Detroit Water and Sewerage Department

Bryan Peckinpugh, Public Affairs Director, Detroit Water and Sewerage Department

Sherry Gay-Dagnogo, Detroit Ombudsman