



WATER IS AN
ESSENTIAL
HUMAN RIGHT

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Wednesday April 1, 2020

Detroit Water and Sewerage Department

Board of Water Commissioners

735 Randolph Street, 5th Floor

Detroit Michigan 48226

From: Demeeke Williams and Beulah Walker (Directors, Hydrate Detroit)

Dear Board of Water Commissioners,

As of Saturday March 28, 2020, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer issued a Executive Order calling for a statewide moratorium on water shutoffs during the COVID-19 outbreak. Governor Whitmer expanded this emergency order from a previous Executive Order issued from March 9, 2020 including all residents living in the state of Michigan to have their water services restored and to expand funding to help with plumbing repairs designated for water restoration. This is a huge victory for Detroit residents and for residents across the region of Southeastern Michigan. It is very important for the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department to continue water restorations during the pandemic as it ensures residents are able to stay clean. The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, as a public water supply must communicate regularly and accurately report on restoring residents' water. Hydrate Detroit applauds Governor Whitmer for taking extra steps to ensure everyone city and statewide across the region of Southeastern Michigan has access to clean, running water.

Pursuant by law, (found in Executive Order 2020-28 of the 2nd bullet point, acting under Michigan Constitution of 1963): the Governor's order explains that public water supply determines any occupied residences within its service area have had water service shutoff for any reason other than non-payment, it must make best efforts to remedy such conditions and restore water service to such occupied residences as soon as possible. The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department still has restrictions and stipulations in place for water restoration to homes in the city of Detroit, in which occupied tenants are living in the homes with no verifiable property owner listed in the Wayne county registrar of deeds (Treasurer's office). There are also occupied properties that have tenants living in the homes for which DWSD has never verified (for example, properties being sent water bills as "resident" listed and there is no actual name or water bill account verified on the property, so it gets paid without any investigation into whom occupies the property). There are also situations with delinquent landlords and property managers not keeping in compliance with the city rental ordinances. There are also slumlords and outside investors with properties of tenants living in the homes whose name may be on the water bill but is not registered to the Wayne county registrar of deeds. Any rules and regulations concerning limitations as to why water cannot be turned on in all Detroit households must be disregarded and have access promptly restored, as we are in a global pandemic whose preventative measures require diligent washing of hands and face.

Hydrate Detroit receives calls from residents that are acquiring new residential properties sold by private sellers or third-party management companies, and there are issues with the water turn-ons due to either unpaid debt acquired on the property or names not verified on the water bill account. DWSD has policies to verify and fix past transactions by bringing them up to date and starting anew fresh on the new water bill accounts provided to current occupant living in the property. We agree that investors or property management companies can opt out of the executive order, but they should be required to allow their tenants or inhabitants of the property to turn on water services in their name. DWSD also has renters who are living in homes where the water service is sent to the property owner and the water bill went unpaid and unaddressed. Residents must be given a chance to show available paperwork for DWSD to bypass said property owner and turn the water on regardless of situation or circumstance. We request DWSD work with property owners, tenants and inhabitants of properties to give them the correct information and help with their matters.

Pursuant by Law (as found in the 4th bullet point under the Michigan Constitution), the Governor's order details that public water supply must submit a report under section 3 of the order by April 12, 2020. If this order does not meet all of the requirements described in section 3, then the public water supply must submit a supplemental report every thirty days until it submits a report that meets all of section 3's requirements.

Hydrate Detroit would like to report that Detroit Water and Sewerage Department Executive Director Gary Brown has indicated that on March 24, 2020 Conference call with the Detroit City Council that he has spoken with community groups to update progress and share information. We find that to be very concerning as Hydrate Detroit has been frequently identifying clients and receiving calls from residents seeking help for water restorations. Communications with us can go a long way on the ground by keeping

up to date and making sure everyone has water service restored. In this time, we all have to work together to prevent this pandemic from getting worse. We request that the Detroit Board of Water Commissioners hold calls and public communications that are available to residents and provide progress updates on their compliance with the executive order. Since Zoom calls seem to work best with teleconferencing and video conferencing, it is recommended that the Executive Director and Board of Water Commissioners provide daily updates in the form of a two-hour meeting that allows questions and answers from the public.

DWSD must have a complete analysis of each day it has taken action, including progress reports, copies of established work orders, information on how many people had access restored, status reports of the properties turned on, along with available notations and to count the number of addresses fully restored in the city of Detroit. The analysis must be made public by uploading those reports to the DWSD Legistar website and also posted on the city website for proper viewing, PDFs preferred. DWSD must report not just to the city leaders such as the Mayor, City Council, Water Board Officials and GLWA Personnel, but also be transparent and accurate with the residents and citizens of the city of Detroit.

Pursuant by law, (as found in the 5th bullet point under the Michigan Constitution), the Governor's order details that "nothing in this order abrogates the obligation of a resident to pay for water, prevents a public water supply from charging any customer for water service or reduces the amount a resident may owe to a public water supply"

The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department and the Detroit Board of Water Commissioners must be assured that nobody will evade their responsibility or use this opportunity to escape, not pay or discontinue seeking resolutions to fixing their water services. As it stands, there are a large number of residents that were on previous payment plan arrangements and citizens in debt via water bills who would love an opportunity to halt, suspend and definitively resolve their payment issues. Hydrate Detroit is demanding this body of commissioners vote to adopt a resolution by the Detroit City Council passed unanimously on March 31, 2020 by "waiving all late fees, penalties, and any of all supposed charges for residential water or sewer services, shutoffs, connections and other services". By doing this, residents will be able to come forward and the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department can use this as an incentive to have residents sign up for the water restart program. Additionally, we implore DWSD and the Board of Water Commissioners to endorse this resolution and fully participate in creating and developing the COVID-19 Service Plan endorsed by Detroit City Council President Brenda Jones to ensure residents have a fair shot at resolving their water service problems and situations without punishment or intimidation. In the midst of this pandemic, let's be reasonable and offer the opportunity to help citizens rather than continuously harm or hurt residents in anticipation of the executive order expiring or being lifted.

At the time of the writing of this letter, Executive Director Gary Brown has indicated on a conference call with Brenda Jones that he will bring this proposal to the Board of Water Commissioners to be voted on and approved. Hydrate Detroit will be watching the vote and recording who will stand with the people, for public health, safety, empathy, and compassion in placing public health over private profit. We hope

that the Board of Water Commissioners sides with the people, by following the Governor's orders and enforcing rules that protect our city and its resident's access to safe clean drinking water.

Hydrate Detroit believes that water is an essential human right and that nobody should be denied access to clean, fresh, running water for any reason. We appreciate the staff of the customer service division as they are the first responders to the public. It is vested within their attitudes, their problem-solving and initiative to take charge and tackle the problem in a dignified manner to keep the water on. We appreciate this body of Water Commissioners taking action by adopting the proposed resolution and complying with the Governor's executive order.

Thank you for reading this letter. You may reply back to this letter at the information above within 3-5 days of the time this letter has been received.

Sincerely,

Demeeke Williams

Beulah Walker

Chief Director

Chief Director

Hydrate Detroit

Hydrate Detroit