



WATER IS AN
ESSENTIAL
HUMAN RIGHT

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Detroit Board of Water Commissioners
Restoration Update
May 20, 2020

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Wednesday May 20, 2020

**Detroit Board of Water Commissioners
735 Randolph Street
Detroit Michigan 48226**

From Demeeke Williams, Chief Director

RE: Water Restoration Update

Greetings to the Detroit Board of Water Commissioners,

I am currently writing this letter out of care and concern advocating for Detroit residents with their water shutoff.

As the Coronavirus Pandemic maybe showing signs of slowing down and places are beginning to open in Michigan again. I would like to know the plans and solutions the Board of Commissioners have in place to prevent residents of the city from having their water shutoff again in mass numbers due to this crisis.

Currently, Detroiters have their water turned on but there are still residents in thousands of dollars' worth of debt that have been accumulating before COVID-19. There are over 275,000 customers in the DWSD Billing System are active and inactive residential accounts that are 50% or more owing money they do not have to pay. Even if there have been residents getting stimulus investment from the US Government and efforts made of outreach to restore water service, the overall goal is maintaining the public safety and livelihood of Detroiters is very important. Debt relief and reductions must happen as the next phase of restoring water service and the Detroit Water Department can really make a big difference in ensuring that it wants to work with the public in paying their water bills.

The CoronaVirus Water Restart Plan and Water Residential Assistance Program are not efficient and robust models of affordability. It's a chain of debt with fools

attached into an abyss of digging a tunnel of Debt that should be alleviated. Payment plan arrangements are flawed & 10/30/50 program has failed residents.

Hydrate Detroit is advocating for the Detroit Board of Water Commissioners and Detroit Water and Sewerage Department to implement the Water Amnesty Relief proposal that was established as an official recommendation of the Blue-Ribbon Water Affordability Panel in April 2015. The suggestions and solutions from the proposal included Debt relief and models to cut past arrearages and debt that's chained to citizens for which they can pay off a percentage amount to zero out the debt and start brand new with a zero balance, new meter and plumbing repairs.

Hydrate Detroit officially proposed a Detroit Water Amnesty program for residents to address situations on their past-due water bills. This is a 90-day amnesty program that will give the Detroit Water Department enough time to receive past due payments and also offer Detroiters opportunity by working to solve their situations and help to zero out their water bills in good standing.

Amnesty is a period where citizens receive help and get a reduced settlement on their water bills by offers of 30% to 50%. If certain citizens qualify with water bills over \$5,000, a 70% reduction settlement should be worked out. This model is an effective way to relieve Detroiters of high-water bills and start over with a clean slate.

Hydrate Detroit is demanding certain clauses of the payment arrangement be amended in terms of signing the 24-month payment plan agreement. We are asking the penalties of falling off the payment plan be eliminated, for its ineffectiveness to collect on recent payments. Residents cannot be charged the full amount owed if they have tried to stay current on their payment plan in good standing and missed one payment due to unforeseen circumstances. We are proposing DWSD change their billing system by allowing people to pay their current payment arrangement in a separate charge instead of its current practice by adding the previous past due charges combined with billing current charges of water. Residents should be charged one separate bill from the current water and sewer charges and a separate bill from their previous payment plan charges. Residents and customers can pay off their debt while keeping track of their current monthly and usage charges, as we see this as an effective way for the city to manage its revenues from previous water debts during the amnesty period. We also request DWSD to amend its payment plan and offer a process to challenge and dispute billing errors and issues.

The problems with the WRAP Program and the Water Restart Program has presented significant challenges in assessing the debt and fixing the problems that are built on legacy debt improperly assessed. Homeowners should be offered a deal in which to cut the past old arrearages and debt accrued from charges late fees and surcharges that accumulated from non-payment.

The DWSD will save money and time also keeping in compliance revenue requirements with the Great Lakes Regional Water Authority. As I see concerns arising with the Executive Director about falling revenues, furloughing employees and suspension of collections, I see major concerns with lingering effects of this crisis lasting on residents that will never recover from this unprecedented emergency.

By Hydrate Detroit Numbers 62% of the City of Detroit is shutoff completely from their water service, of that number 18% are senior citizens that have been denied help or assistance. Hydrate Detroit has 483 Clients in our Data Base whom we still advocate for Affordability concerns since 2014 when the

Aggressive Water Shut Offs were implemented under State of Michigan EFM Draconian Laws implemented by Kevin Orr via the Governor Richard D. Snyder. Hydrate Detroit has served more than over 1,000 people and paid partial payments on residents to keep their water services flowing by negotiating with DWSD customer service to cut the debt and reduce the charges. Here are our numbers:

Hydrate Detroit Numbers collected from our database:

- **City of Detroit Residents Living on a Fixed Income 26.5%**
- **Reflects the Ability of Paying Customers to Pay the Unlimited Water Rate Increases**
- **City of Detroit Resident's Water Shut Off 47.2%**
- **City of Detroit Residents Owe at Least 50.5% of balances between \$1000-\$3000**
- **City of Detroit Residents contacted DWSD for payments plans 58%**
- **City of Detroit Residents has signed payment plans 49.5%**
- **City of Detroit Residents 36.6% pay bills in person**
- **City of Detroit Residents received resources to pay their water bill 26.3%**
- **City of Detroit Clients who sign up for bill payment assistance 96.6%**
- **City of Detroit Residents who need other resources 13.5%**
- **City of Detroit Residents over age 50-55 12.4% • age 40-45 25.1 % • age 30-35 24.2%**
- **Age 25-30 8.7% • age 18-25 17.8%**

Hydrate Detroit have identified actual rate paying customers of DWSD that have tried everything before they exhausted all resources. We bring residents down to the Board of Water Commissioners meeting, work with DWSD Customer Service Personnel and help them receive reduced deals and settlements to keep their water services flowing.

Hydrate Detroit brought more than \$5,000.00 raised by donations to the Detroit Water & Sewerage Department to help residents that have been shutoff or disconnected from their water service. Hydrate Detroit has also helped advocate for residents to keep their water on by getting another payment plan arrangement and working to reduce the bill or provide a settlement so that nobody water will be shutoff.

If it was not for Hydrate Detroit and other groups fighting for water affordability since 2014, to actively help citizens and residents fight water shutoffs and advocate for their bills to be reduced, the city would be in an even worse situation just like Baton Rouge Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina, when 99 percent of the city resident population was shutoff with no resources or no recourse of action to restore water service.

Other assistance programs can join us in helping more residents keep their water on by working with us. We welcome those who want to be a part of the positive solution of keeping clean running water to all residents living in the City of Detroit.

In conclusion, Board of Water Commissioners, the residents and citizens of the city of Detroit have done things "your way" and it has not worked out for all of us. The leadership have not changed. There have been no accolades or rewards given to you in this crisis. This is still an unsolved problem you refuse to handle and deal with. Instead of deflecting, making up false narratives and kicking buckets of broken

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water mains and promises down the road, now is time to change and implement policy that benefits the customers, ratepayers and consumers of this public municipal utility that delivers water to over 133 communities and townships in Southeast Michigan. Stop the water shutoffs, turn the water all the way back on and implement this proposal of water amnesty that was sent to you as a package of correspondence. We are reaching out to finally work with you to prevent further situations as

Hydrate Detroit welcomes to work with the Board of Water Commissioners and the Executive Leadership of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department to get a move on this ASAP by setting conversations and meetings with us and other water experts to discuss affordability and cost saving measures to help residents that have fallen victim to water shutoffs. If anyone would like to step up and reach out, I ask that you contact me at the following information listed above.

I request that this letter is published for the record and stamped of receipt to the Board of Water Commissioners on this date of Wednesday May 20, 2020

Sincerely,

Demeeko Williams

Chief Director

Hydrate Detroit

Electronically signed