

**From:** [Benjamin Pauli](#)  
**To:** [CEO@GLWATER.org](mailto:CEO@GLWATER.org)  
**Subject:** proposed rate increase  
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Dear CEO Coffey and GLWA Board Members,

My apologies for submitting this written comment late--I only recently became aware of today's deadline. I am heartened to see that the Board may extend the comment period through the duration of the meeting tomorrow. I hope it decides to do so and that it takes the following remarks into consideration.

My name is Dr. Ben Pauli and I am a resident of Flint and the acting chair of the Flint Water System Advisory Council. Flint, as you well know, has become infamous for the water quality crisis that resulted from the switch of its drinking water supply to the Flint River over a decade ago. What is less well known is that the so-called Flint water crisis began not as a water quality crisis but as a water affordability crisis. In the summer of 2014, Flint residents took to the streets to protest unaffordable water rates and the practice of water shutoffs. Since then, they have consistently advocated for rates that reflect not only water system needs but considerations of equity and affordability.

In 2017, the city of Flint was put in the difficult position of having to decide between two long-term water options in the midst of a crisis recovery effort and a massive breakdown of public trust. The rejected option--joining the KWA pipeline--was initially sold to residents as a means of bringing down costs and easing pressure on water rates. Skepticism of this promise--and of the KWA project itself--is part of what led many residents (and ultimately city leadership) to support the other option: a 30-year contract with GLWA. However, promises made by GLWA were also part of what cemented the deal. We were told, for example, that rates would be kept down despite the need to pay off the KWA debt. We were told that going with GLWA was not only the safest bet from a public health standpoint, but was in the financial interest of Flint residents.

Even residents who supported the GLWA option, however, were concerned about the prospect of being locked into a 30-year contract with an entity over which they had little control. Flint is all too used to having its water situation dictated to it, in ways that can prove to be harmful and expensive despite nice-sounding promises. To enter into such an arrangement was to make the city vulnerable yet again.

Now, many residents feel as though that vulnerability is being exploited. The rate increases approved by the Board last year and proposed for next year are beyond anything that was envisaged by those who placed their trust in GLWA in 2017. And they are only going to deepen the ongoing water affordability crisis in Flint. Even with our local water utility making widespread use of shutoffs as a collection tactic, bill payment is around 80%. If the city were to pass GLWA's proposed rate increases through to residents, that collection rate will drop

further and even more people will end up cut off entirely. This is not good for anyone.

GLWA is obviously not responsible for everything that goes on inside the city of Flint. However, the choices it makes have a profound influence on the context within which local administrators decide on retail rates, shutoff policies, and other water-related matters. GLWA has a responsibility to listen to the perspectives of the residents who will be impacted by any potential rate increases and to factor their concerns and perspectives into its own decision-making. No rate increases should be implemented without a concomitant strengthening of GLWA's assistance program, articulation of a long-term affordability plan, and a thorough, public accounting of all of the system needs that would be funded through increases.

The people of Flint are counting on you to demonstrate your concern, good faith, and commitment to water partnerships that take the interests of all of your customers--but especially the most vulnerable--into careful consideration.

Thank you,  
Dr. Ben Pauli

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*Flint Fights Back: Environmental Justice and Democracy in the Flint Water Crisis* (MIT Press 2019): <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/flint-fights-back>

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