



April 16, 2026

We strongly **urge the state legislature to help address the growing water affordability crisis impacting Michiganders across the state.** Despite the best cost-containment efforts by regional and local utilities, household water bills continue to rise rapidly after decades of federal disinvestment that shifted nearly the entire financial burden for water system maintenance and upgrades to ratepayers. Water providers alone are unable to address the growing crisis.

Utility affordability is an undisputed crisis in our state and the nation right now. While there is federal assistance for *energy* bills through the Low-Income Household Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), there is no equivalent federal program for household water bills. Further, there is no state program for water assistance parallel to the Michigan Energy Assistance Program (MEAP). Water assistance appropriations represent the only state support for water bill payments. Available resources of local programs, such as the Great Lakes Water Authority's Water Residential Assistance Program and the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department's LifelineH2O, are fully subscribed with additional needs remaining.

Between 2020 and 2026, temporary federal water assistance (\$36.2 million) and state water assistance (\$100 million) provided a total of \$136.2 million to help our community water systems recover revenue from customers who were unable to pay their water bills. Over the past six years, assistance dollars have helped thousands of Michigan households keep their tap water running, live with dignity, and meet their basic health and hygiene needs.

When customers are unable to pay their water bills, our public water systems are left to solve the problem on their own, largely accomplished by deferring vital system upgrades and/or by raising rates on all customers to cover the costs for those who can't pay.

Recent outreach to rural water operators indicates that residents in small communities are experiencing unaffordable bills and higher arrearage debt. Retirees and fixed-income residents have described hardships as higher rates are passed onto them to pay for local infrastructure repairs, upgrades, and operations. This is a statewide issue.

**The undersigned ask for your support in the following ways:**

**1) Appropriate \$60 million to help fund necessary regional and local water assistance programs in Fiscal Year (FY) 2027.** This is a smart financial investment for urban, suburban, and rural communities to help water utilities maintain their basic operations and avoid the household impact of water shutoffs. Water utilities are a critical frontline defense against communicable diseases and dehydration, and can reduce utility evictions, property lien tax foreclosures, and lost economic productivity.

**2) Pass the bipartisan Water Affordability Package (Senate Bills 248-256).** This package would replace the need for yearly appropriations and create a statewide program similar to the very successful and bipartisan Michigan Energy Assistance Program (MEAP). Energy assistance has helped thousands of Michiganders afford electricity, natural gas, and propane for over a decade.

By capping payments to affordable levels for low-earning Michiganders, this program could directly assist almost 300,000 households and contribute to greater economic stability for both families and water providers. Local water providers also benefit by receiving consistent payments from program participants that support the system's operations and maintenance.

Thank you for your attention.

Respectfully,

ACCESS	EFC Consulting, Inc.
Area Agencies on Aging Association of Michigan	Elevate
Benton Harbor Community Water Council	Environmental Transformation Movement of Flint
BlueGreen Alliance	Flint Rising
Canfield Consortium	Food and Water Watch
Central United Methodist Church - Detroit	Friends in Deed
Clean Water Action	General Baker Institute
Community and Home Supports, Inc.	Great Lakes Water Authority
Community Resource Center of Manchester	Leaders Advancing and Helping Communities
COTS Detroit	Lighthouse Michigan
Crossroads of Michigan	MACC Development
DABO Detroit, Inc	Michigan Catholic Conference
Detroit Heals Detroit	Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation
Detroit Jews for Justice	Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness
Detroit Justice Center	Michigan Community Action
Detroit Phoenix Center	Michigan Environmental Council
Detroit Water and Sewerage Department	Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition
Developing K.I.D.S.	Michigan Interfaith Power & Light

Michigan League of Conservation Voters	Pontiac Meals on Wheels Foundation
Michigan League for Public Policy	Saginaw CAP
Michigan Methodist Federation for Social Action - Michigan	Sierra Club - Michigan Chapter
Michigan Nonprofit Association	Sisters of Mercy
Michigan Nurses Association	Supreme Transitions
Michigan Poverty Law Program	The Center for Urban Youth and Family Development
Michigan Section - American Water Works Association	The Nature Conservancy
Michigan Welfare Rights Organization	The Salvation Army Great Lakes Division
Mothering Justice	United Church of Christ, Michigan Conference, Detroit Metro Association
Natural Resources Defense Council	United Way of Southeastern Michigan
Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner	Urban Neighborhood Initiatives
Oakland Family Services	Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency
Oakland Forward	Winning Futures
Pax Christi Michigan	Womack Temple CME Church
People's Water Board Coalition	