

Legislation Text

File #: 200385, **Version:** 0

Calling upon the Congress to enact and fund a national, sustainable water affordability plan similar to the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (“LIHEAP”).

WHEREAS, Recognizing that access to clean, safe water is essential to sustaining life, rising retail water rates nationwide are profoundly concerning, leading municipal and county officials across the United States to support a robust federal subsidy as the most appropriate way to avoid the negative impacts to health, welfare, and safety that a widespread loss of water access would cause; and

WHEREAS, The impacts of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic have reemphasized the need for a federally funded sustainable water affordability plan, including a water rate subsidy program for low-income ratepayers, modeled after LIHEAP; and

WHEREAS, The need for a subsidy to support long term, sustainable and affordable access to water and sewerage services for the benefit of low income residential customers will not end after the pandemic is better controlled, because unaffordability of these services for the poor is a feature of the water industry’s existing rate structure as well as a permanent menace to public health; and

WHEREAS, The LIHEAP program receives and expends approximately \$3.5 billion annually to support gas and electric heating utility costs for low income residents throughout the United States; and

WHEREAS, Based on the same realities that lead the federal government to recognize the need to support low income families by subsidizing energy, it is time to also provide a robust federal subsidy for the precious resource of clean and safe drinking water; and

WHEREAS, While there are sporadic calls for municipalities to become the “water bank” and provide free or subsidized water, the federal government is the proper entity to fund necessary water subsidies for low income families, as demonstrated by the popular and successful LIHEAP program; and

WHEREAS, Going forward, with adequate federal funding via a water affordability program modeled on LIHEAP, the Philadelphia Water Department (“PWD”) could develop more broadly based, comprehensive and institutionalized policies on a business process model basis, to deal with the affordability of its services, their accessibility to all Philadelphians, and the resulting key community public health issues arising out of the provision of water and sewerage services in an urban environment; and

WHEREAS, PWD has blazed the trail with the Tier-Assistance Program, adopting equitable rate structures for water and sewerage services, consisting of a water affordability plan focused on individual customers’ ability to pay for these vital services and capping payments at a sliding scale of percentage of income based on federally defined poverty levels: bills are capped at two percent of monthly income for residents earning less than 50 percent of the federal poverty level (“FPL”), 2.5 percent for residents earning between 51 and 100 percent FPL, at three percent for residents earning between 101 and 150 FPL, and at four percent for those earning between 150 and 250 FPL; and

WHEREAS, National adoption of such an equitable and affordable rates policy would be best both for the provision of service by PWD and for the public health and human rights of its customers, and also for the water quality of our waterways; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Calls upon the Congress to enact and fund national, sustainable water affordability plan similar to the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (“LIHEAP”).

FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution shall be transmitted to the United States Congress.