



Water Affordability Pledge

Everyone needs access to clean, safe, and affordable drinking water for good individual health and public health. Unfortunately, water rates in rural and urban communities have increased over 41 percent since 2010¹, and in some places much more. This is partially due to antiquated water systems reaching their lifespan across the country. According to American Water Works, it will take at least \$1 trillion dollars over the next 25 years to upgrade and maintain America's water infrastructure.² Unfortunately, federal funding for water infrastructure and treatment of drinking and wastewater has fallen 77 percent from when it peaked in 1977 to 4 percent in 2017, meaning residents often bear 100 percent of the cost to upgrade their water infrastructure.³

Compounding this problem are large storm events wreaking havoc on an already overburdened wastewater treatment system, which in turn, is driving up treatment costs.

In 2016, more than 15 million Americans, or 1 out of every 20 households, had their water shut off due to being unable to pay their water bill.⁴ Pre-COVID, it was estimated that by the end of 2022, more than a third of households across the nation will not be able to pay their water bill.⁵

Water costs are often felt disproportionately by communities of color that were redlined and experienced disinvestment for decades, leading to high income inequality. As a result, basic water and sewer costs are a higher proportion of disposable income. Research from the American Civil Liberties Union found areas of Detroit with populations less than 75% African Americans had on average 60% less water shutoffs due to nonpayment of their water bill. This disparity increased from 2019-2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. From Jan. 1, 2019 to Jan. 1, 2020, 93% of water shutoffs due to water bill nonpayment in Detroit impacted communities with 75% African American residents.

Unfortunately, when families cannot pay their water bills, in most parts of the country, their water is shut-off. Shutting off water to residents in communities is a public health issue that can spread diseases and viruses like COVID-19. Henry Ford Global Health Initiative found that patients who live on blocks that experienced water shutoffs were 1.55 times more likely to be diagnosed with a water-associated illness⁶, not to mention the mental health stress that comes along with a lack of running tap water.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency uses 4.5% of monthly household income as the standard to evaluate water and sewer rate affordability - no more than 2% for drinking and 2.5% for sewer rates. Unfortunately, in many places across the country, residents are paying far more than 4.5% of their household monthly income for water services. In cities like Cleveland, Austin, New Orleans, Santa Fe, and San Diego more than half of those below 50% of the federal poverty level are paying in excess of 12% of their income for water services. The United Nations maintains no household should be paying more than 3% of their monthly income on their water bill.

¹ <https://research.msu.edu/affordable-water-in-us-reaching-a-crisis/>

² shorturl.at/iC269

³ <https://fas.org/sqp/crs/misc/96-647.pdf>

⁴ https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/sites/default/files/rpt_1810_water-shutoffs-web2.pdf

⁵ <https://research.msu.edu/affordable-water-in-us-reaching-a-crisis/>

⁶ <https://www.dropbox.com/s/h6mp7iki4lvkvyz/Water%20Shutoffs%20%26%20Illnesses%20Final.pdf?dl=0>

Every American has a right to clean, safe, and affordable water. Water is a basic need for life. We, therefore, are asking potential candidates to make a commitment to ensuring all Americans have access to clean, safe, and affordable water by supporting the Water Affordability Platform. The Water Affordability Platform is a set of goals and principles, and a vision, developed by community for community, informed by the experiences of people and places fighting for equitable and affordable water access that can be used alongside community-driven efforts towards water affordability. We understand that progress towards these goals may require working through many avenues, multiple vehicles, piece by piece over time, and we understand that there is no easy fix to these issues.

By endorsing this pledge, you will join us in committing to the points and principles within the Water Affordability Platform as we continue to fight for clean, safe, and affordable water.

Please forward questions and signed pledge forms to Kristy Meyer, Freshwater Future Associate Director, kristy@freshwaterfuture.org.

Water Affordability Platform**

1. Water affordability must acknowledge that water is a public trust, the provision of water is a public good and water is not a commodity subject to privatization.
2. Water affordability must be situated within a broader commitment to ensuring access to clean, safe, affordable water for all.
3. Water affordability must be modeled along the lines of a sliding-scale, income-based rate system, such as that devised in Roger Colton's 2005 Water Affordability plan prepared for the City of Detroit.
4. Water affordability must be centered within a framework of preserving and maintaining public health.
5. Water affordability must maintain a commitment to principles of conservation and providing assistance to low income residents to ensure they can be proper stewards of their water resources.
6. Water affordability must enshrine quality customer service as a central value along with a commitment to acknowledge the human dignity of all the people it serves.
7. Water affordability must find appropriate ways to deal with past consumer debt, such as the policies being implemented in Philadelphia.
8. Water affordability must eschew water shutoffs as a policy for being inconsistent with the values of public health and the commitment to acknowledge the human dignity of all the people it serves.
9. Water assistance plans are not the same as water affordability plans and must not be advertised as such.
10. Tiered water pricing plans, where water is priced by volume, are not the same as water affordability plans and must not be advertised as such.
11. To ensure community justice in this water affordability platform, provide training, employment, contracting and other economic opportunities for infrastructure design, construction, operations, and management to low- and very low-income persons, especially recipients of government assistance for housing, and to businesses that provide economic opportunities to low- and very low-income persons.

***This is drawing from the [Ten-Points](#) copyrighted by the Michigan Water Unity Table (November 14, 2018)*

Signature

Printed Name and Date