

**STATEMENT OF LINDA L. COLWELL-SMITH, MLA, MSLIS
VICE PRESIDENT, HOLME CIRCLE CIVIC ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE WATER, SEWER & STORM WATER RATE BOARD
HOLY FAMILY UNIVERSITY, APRIL 19, 2018**

Good evening. My name is Linda L. Colwell-Smith, and I am the Vice President of Holme Circle Civic Association (HCCA) in Northeast Philadelphia. Thank you for this opportunity to state our civic association's position on the proposed water rate increases.

The HCCA is celebrating its tenth anniversary in 2018, where our mission is to continue "to work for the improvement in the quality of life in the Holme Circle area by fostering community among residents and businesses, promoting civic involvement and volunteering, and ensuring that public services meet the needs of residents and businesses in Holme Circle Civic Association's geographic boundaries." We hold monthly meetings, where community members are free to voice their opinions on topics of concern.

And your proposed rate increase is a very hot topic with our constituents, many of whom have read reporter Andrew Maykuth's article in the Philadelphia *Inquirer* (4/16/18). While Mr. Maykuth's article presented a balanced view of the proposed rate increase, our members remember the following:

- The Philadelphia Water Department increased residential rates by 70% since 2007, and now want to increase them by an additional 11% by 2020;
- The "typical bill" for residential customers who use 500 cubic feet (roughly 3740 gallons) monthly will jump by \$7.29 per month, or about \$90.00 extra per year – by 2020; and
- There is about \$236 million in uncollected and overdue water bills outstanding—why doesn't the PWD go after these customers, instead of raising our bills?

Many of our members are senior citizens on fixed incomes, or are families struggling to cover their rent and other bills while feeding their families. This proposed rate increase, coming after the recently announced property tax reassessments, is causing much concern – and, adding insult to injury, PECO customers received notices of two separate upcoming rate increases in their April bills! Our members feel they are being “nickel & dimed” to bankruptcy – and they are frightened and worried.

We realize the PWD needs more revenue from higher water rates to (as the *Inquirer* article pointed out) “cover increasing operating costs and the costs to comply with stricter environmental regulations, including upgrades to water- and wastewater-treatment plants. It is also increasing the rate of replacing sewers and water mains, whose average age is 70 years old.” Broken water mains, especially during the frigid winter months, are nothing new to many Philadelphia neighborhoods, Holme Circle included – but passing these costs along to already overburdened PWD customers is asking too much.

So, we ask the Water, Sewer, and Storm Water Rate Board, in conjunction with the Public Advocate (Community Legal Services), to take a hard, critical look at the proposed rate request (as the Board did in 2016, when it successfully cut \$16 million from the PWD’s \$105 million rate increase request) and oppose it, as we do. However, if this is not possible or feasible, then we request the Board to look for ways to reduce the amount of the rate increase – and to increase educational outreach for customers on the Tiered Assistance Program (TAP) and other programs for low-income consumers.

Our members are saying enough is enough – and we agree. Thank you for your attention.