

SUBMITTED VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

February 18, 2021

Commissioner Randy Hayman
Philadelphia Water Department
1101 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Commissioner Hayman:

I am writing to request your prompt recall of a proposed 17% water bill increase. Philadelphians have been devastated by the pandemic and face a long road to economic recovery. Currently, more than one in four customers have fallen behind on bills, and more than 60,000 residential households have fallen so far behind that they risk water service shutoff.

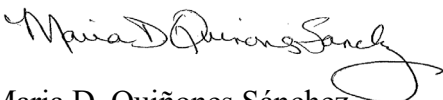
Instead, I ask that your Department present Philadelphia City Council with a plan to substantially increase enrollment in customer assistance programs and payment agreements for families who were eligible before the pandemic as well as those who have fallen behind since its inception. I also ask that your Department re-evaluate a six-year \$3 billion capital budget and align revenue adjustments with the City of Philadelphia's plan to leverage recent state investments and forthcoming federal relief funds rather than asking struggling Philadelphians to bear this burden.

I am proud of our work together in developing and promoting the Tiered Assistance Program, the nation's first income-based water bill program for low-income residents, which now features a pathway to full debt forgiveness upon twenty-four months of timely payment. But as you know, only a fraction of an estimated 60,000 eligible low-income households are enrolled in the program, while thousands of additional households face new hardships and need assistance.

In 2018, City Council hosted the Philadelphia Water, Sewer, and Storm Water Rate Board (PWRB), where residents shared concerns about the effect of a proposed 11% rate increase on cost-burdened property owners and tenants. The Board accordingly approved a reduced bill increase of approximately 1%, while stabilizing revenues through the Philadelphia Fire Department. In 2021, I expect that the Board and my colleagues will amplify concerns about neighbors' housing security as we confront the unprecedented economic impact of the pandemic.

For all these reasons, I request that the Philadelphia Water Department recall the proposed rate increase and work with City Council to develop an affordable alternative.

Respectfully,



Maria D. Quiñones Sánchez
Councilwoman, 7th District

cc: James Kenney, Mayor
Darrell L. Clarke, Council President
Sonny Popowsky, PWRB Chairperson