

Philadelphia Water, Sewer and Storm Water Rate Board Public Hearing
March 18, 2021

PHILADELPHIA WATER, SEWER AND STORM WATER
RATE BOARD PUBLIC HEARING

Thursday, March 18, 2021
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

TIME: 6:00 p.m.
LOCATION: Virtually
HELD BEFORE: MARLANE R. CHESTNUT
Hearing Officer

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2 P R O C E E D I N G S

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4 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: This is the
5 fourth public hearing scheduled by the
6 Philadelphia Water, Sewer and Storm Water Rate
7 Board to hear public comments in the pending
8 request of the Philadelphia Water Department to
9 change its rates and charges for fiscal years
10 2022 and 2023.

11 My name is Marlane Chestnut. I am the
12 hearing officer that's been selected by the
13 Rate Board to oversee this case.

14 Normally, we would have an introduction
15 and I would let the participants introduce
16 themselves. We'd talk about the schedule and
17 I'd explain the process, but I understand that
18 Council Member Quiñones-Sánchez has a
19 commitment this evening, so she requested that
20 her representative, I guess, be allowed to go
21 first.

22 Is that you, Eric?

23 MR. DASENT: No. Council Member Sánchez
24 is here.

1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Oh. She's
2 here?

3 MR. DASENT: Yes.

4 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Thank you very
5 much. And thank you for working with Eric on
6 this

7 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Council Member,
8 please.

9 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Thank you to all
10 the Water Rate Board Members for their
11 participation and their advocacy and all of the
12 work you do all year long.

13 As many of you know, my name is Maria
14 Quiñones-Sánchez. I'm Councilwoman to the 7th
15 Councilmanic District. And for the last four
16 or five years, have been working very closely
17 with the Water Department in hoping to create,
18 along with our advocates, one of the most
19 important toolboxes that we have for keeping
20 people in their homes, which is water
21 affordability rates.

22 I want to thank Commissioner Hayman and
23 his entire team who's worked with me over the
24 years and around -- not only this issue, but

1 how do we continue to provide water, which we
2 believe is a right for folks, to the citizens
3 of Philadelphia and ensure that water -- that
4 is not a reason why folks must leave their
5 homes.

6 I want to thank the Water Rate Board for
7 providing this forum for us to provide the kind
8 of input that we need.

9 The Water Rate Board is a creation of City
10 Council and President Darrell Clarke, and we
11 view it as a valuable tool in ensuring that
12 there is fairness and there is a public
13 discussion around water increases.

14 I want to thank our advocates from
15 Community Legal Services and others who
16 continue to work with us.

17 We are extremely excited about our TAP
18 program that benefits thousands of residents
19 and households. And we are super excited about
20 the launching of our forgiveness program last
21 year and look forward to its implementation
22 process.

23 I will be forwarding an official letter by
24 all members of City Council. I will read some

1 of the content of the letter in the chronology
2 because I think it's important for the record,
3 but understand that City Council may weigh in
4 with its own public hearing and discussion in
5 this matter as we enter our budget process.

6 As all of you know, last year's budget
7 process was quite difficult, but as a member of
8 City Council and a senior member of City
9 Council and as Chair of Appropriation, there's
10 always been a political willingness and space
11 for us to do what is necessary for our
12 residents, for our infrastructure, by also
13 protecting our most vulnerable.

14 If we've learned anything from COVID, this
15 is when it is even more important for us to do.

16 So the letter will read that we
17 respectfully ask that you reject the proposed
18 water increase by the Water Department so that
19 no family has to choose between heat, food and
20 water while we continue to face this public
21 health crisis.

22 As many of you know, one in four customers
23 has fallen behind on their bills during the
24 pandemic, and more than 50,000 residential

1 households have fallen far behind, that they
2 risk water shutoff.

3 On February 8, I sent a letter to
4 Commissioner Hayman asking for the Water
5 Department to reconsider this rate proposal and
6 to leverage our recent investments by the State
7 and forthcoming, at that point, federal funds
8 and to sign up thousands of families eligible
9 and not yet enrolled in our TAP program.

10 On February 26, the Commissioner responded
11 and we -- a letter, which I'm sure will be
12 provided as part of the record -- and we were
13 pleased to hear of the Water Department's
14 decision to extend the moratorium to
15 April 2022. We appreciate that effort moving
16 forward.

17 On March 11, President Joe Biden and
18 Congress delivered a substantial aid to the
19 City of Philadelphia when they signed into law
20 the American Rescue 10 Act of 2021. This made
21 clear that billions of dollars would be coming
22 to the City of Philadelphia and that those
23 dollars could be used to make the much needed
24 improvements in our water and sewer

1 infrastructure, and at the same time provide
2 additional support for water bill assistance to
3 tenants in the City of Philadelphia and
4 homeowners.

5 Additionally, the Water Department
6 recently submitted and participated in our
7 CARES Act reimbursement for the City of
8 Philadelphia.

9 I believe that given all of the recent
10 announcements, we are in a place where we have
11 time, time, to really review the money that is
12 coming into the City of Philadelphia.

13 All of you know that in addition to the
14 reinvestment fund money and the stabilization
15 fund money at the Water Department, that we can
16 continue our infrastructure plan, put a pause
17 on the rate increase and work at modifying our
18 infrastructure plan while not sacrificing and
19 jeopardizing anymore the residents who find
20 themselves many times in an untenable situation
21 given the pandemic recovery.

22 What we've learned is as much as we all
23 say we want this recovery to be different, that
24 we want to have a social justice lens and

1 equity lens, the applications of rate increases
2 like this never bear out to what we're saying.

3 Let's not only say it after the social
4 unrest and the COVID recovery, a bump that
5 we've had in the road as of the vaccination and
6 access, let us put a pause button on this
7 particular action and use the political will
8 that exists in the City of Philadelphia to
9 ensure that we're prioritizing capital
10 improvement and not use a class A rating as an
11 excuse to over burden the residents at this
12 time.

13 Again, thank you to the Water Rate Board.
14 I look forward to working with the Commissioner
15 and all of you so that we can do both -- we can
16 continue to invest in our infrastructure and we
17 can ensure the residents of Philadelphia that
18 cities like the City of Philadelphia will not
19 use tax rate increase or tax increases to
20 balance our bump, but that we will be more
21 responsible with their taxpayer dollars.

22 Thank you very much. And thank you for
23 allowing me to go first this evening.

24 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you very

1 much, Council Member. I appreciate your
2 remarks.

3 Does anyone want to comment on Council
4 Member's --

5 MR. BALLENGER: I just wanted to express
6 my gratitude for your time this evening,
7 Council Member Sánchez. There's a lot going
8 on, so I appreciate you coming and sharing with
9 us tonight.

10 MR. DASENT: The Department joins in
11 thanking Council Member Sánchez. We thank you.

12 MR. HAVER: Thank you, Council Member.

13 MS. CROSBY: Yes. On behalf of the
14 Revenue Department and the Water Department,
15 thank you, Council Member Sánchez, for
16 appearing tonight at the Rate Board.

17 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I'm sort of
18 surprised to see you, Council Member Sánchez.
19 Usually, people send their representative or
20 someone from their office. So I appreciate you
21 taking the time directly to come.

22 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: The work we've
23 done, which has been incredibly successful and
24 game changing -- we have cities across the

1 country really looking at our work. It's too
2 important. And I want all of you -- as you've
3 taken your time to listen, to understand that I
4 understand the theory of this issue and that
5 we're willing to work with you on behalf of
6 Council leadership and the rest of the council
7 members.

8 Thank you again. And good evening to all
9 of you and thank you.

10 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: We'll resume
11 then.

12 Before I do, let me state that this is an
13 on the record hearing. There's a court
14 reporter who is going to produce a stenographic
15 record of this hearing. And that will be
16 posted on the Rate Board's website along with
17 any other documents that relate to this case.

18 If you do go to the Rate Board's website
19 to see what's posted there, make sure you hit
20 the tab that says the 2021 Rate Proceeding not
21 the 2021 Rate Adjustment Proceeding. That's a
22 different proceeding. So the documents in this
23 case will be under the rate proceeding.

24 Now, the Rate Board is the independent

1 body that was appointed to make decisions
2 concerning the Water Department's rate request.
3 It's been in effect for about ten years and has
4 handled a number of rate cases in that time.

5 As part of its mandate, the hearings be
6 conducted openly and transparently. The Rate
7 Board hired Community Legal Services to
8 represent the interests of residential
9 customers and small users and hired me to act
10 as Hearing Officer.

11 We'll go into a little more about why CLS
12 was selected and why I was selected and what
13 they are planning to do.

14 Just to give you an overview -- let me
15 back up. I need to say something. I think we
16 should do it a different way, here.

17 We're here to hear from you, which are the
18 customers, because it's important to put a
19 human face on the people who are affected by
20 the Rate Board's decision and the activities of
21 the Water Department.

22 We can talk about the customer class
23 generally or generically and say that the
24 customers are being impacted by this or the

1 rate increase will be that, but it really helps
2 to remember that the customers are people.
3 People like you. People who have enough
4 difficulty and need to have their concerns
5 expressed.

6 This is a chance for you to tell us your
7 story, how it affects you, what suggestions do
8 you have for the Water Department to do a
9 better job? What has your experience been?

10 But I'm also going to take the time to
11 talk about the process. And hopefully, you'll
12 feel comfortable that this is a fair, impartial
13 and open process.

14 Nobody is keeping anything secret.
15 Everything is looked at intensively. And I
16 hope -- you may not feel comfortable with any
17 kind of result, but I hope you feel comfortable
18 that we are certainly looking out for your
19 interest. I'll talk more a little bit about
20 that.

21 But at this point, I will allow the Water
22 Department to make a brief statement.

23 Mr. Dasent, did you want to --

24 MR. DASENT: Yes. Sure. Thank you, Judge

1 Chestnut.

2 Glen Abrams will present the Department's
3 overview of the rate proceedings and he's
4 available to speak now.

5 MR. ABRAMS: Thank you. And good evening
6 everyone. My name is Glen Abrams and I'm
7 speaking on behalf of the Water Department in
8 this proceeding.

9 We first want to thank you all for joining
10 this hearing tonight and to share your reviews
11 about the rate increase request that the Water
12 Department has filed with the Philadelphia
13 Water, Sewer and Storm Water Rate Board.

14 As you may know, if the Rate Board
15 approves the Water Department's full request, a
16 typical residential customer using 500 cubic
17 feet of water per month would see their bill
18 increase by about 11.6 percent in Fiscal Year
19 2022 and 5.3 percent in Fiscal Year 2023 or
20 approximately \$7.74 per month beginning on
21 September 1, 2021 and an additional \$3.98
22 beginning on September 1, 2022.

23 The Water Department recognizes that any
24 increase in rates can be a hardship, especially

1 right now, but this increase is necessary to
2 address the Department's current financial
3 deficit and to continue maintaining, upgrading
4 and renewing its system to make sure that clean
5 water is delivered as safely and reliably as
6 possible, and that waste water treatment and
7 storm water management services continue
8 unabated.

9 This system provides essential services
10 that are the foundation of public health in
11 Philadelphia.

12 Importantly, since the Water Department is
13 a municipal utility, it has no shareholders and
14 every dollar that it collects is used to
15 protect the safe and reliable operation and
16 maintenance of the utility system.

17 Rate relief is necessary now to sustain
18 our operations.

19 It should be noted that the Water
20 Department continues to invest in much needed
21 upgrades to critical water and waste water
22 infrastructure, including replacing aging water
23 mains to reduce the occurrence of water main
24 breaks and increase the reliability of water

1 service to customers, extending the life and
2 reliability of the waste water system by
3 repairs and improvements to treatment
4 facilities and improving drinking water
5 treatment and improving our water conveyance
6 system by rehabilitating critical water
7 infrastructures, such as pumping stations and
8 water mains as well as upgrading water
9 treatment facilities.

10 All projects planned for fiscal years 2022
11 and 2023 are critical investments to ensure the
12 utility can support its operations and continue
13 to provide safe and reliable service to current
14 and future customers with a well-maintained
15 water and waste water system that they can
16 count on.

17 I would also highlight that the Water
18 Department has a robust and comprehensive
19 customer assistance program, which helps
20 low-income customers pay their bills, including
21 the Tiered Assistance Program or TAP, the
22 senior citizen discount program and other
23 programs that are more flexible than ever
24 during this difficult time.

1 The Water Department has also agreed to
2 extend the shutoff moratorium for residential
3 customers through April 1, 2022 and has paused
4 enforcement activities for our most vulnerable
5 residential customers.

6 If you're experiencing financial hardship,
7 we want to help. We encourage you to apply for
8 TAP, the senior discount or other programs that
9 are available to assist households with payment
10 difficulties. These programs are accessible
11 through: www.phila.gov/waterbillhelp or by
12 calling (215) 685-6300 Monday through Friday
13 between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

14 I also note that if you have specific
15 billing questions or other service issues that
16 you would like assistance with, please let us
17 know and we will have a customer service
18 representative contact you as soon as possible.

19 Use the chat function to identify yourself
20 or let us know that you would like to speak in
21 a breakout room to exchange contact
22 information.

23 Now, the purpose of today's session is to
24 hear from you, the consumers. We really

1 appreciate you taking the time to share your
2 views with us today. And we look forward to
3 hearing from you. Thank you.

4 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you,
5 Mr. Abrams.

6 Ms. Scott?

7 MR. BALLENGER: Ms. Chestnut, I'm going to
8 take this one.

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Oh. You're
10 going to take this one, Mr. Ballenger?

11 MR. BALLENGER: Yeah.

12 Good evening. I have a little better
13 Wi-Fi in this room. Good evening. My name is
14 Robert Ballenger. I'm joined this evening by
15 Kinteshia Scott. We are two lawyers at
16 Community Legal Services Philadelphia.

17 We have a team who's been appointed to
18 serve as Public Advocate, to represent the
19 interests of the residential and small
20 commercial customers, the mom and pop and
21 corner shops, throughout the City. And there's
22 about half a million of those accounts. And we
23 represent their interests as a whole in this
24 rate proceeding.

1 So we've retained a team of experts to
2 really comb through the Water Department's
3 proposal and to present their independent
4 analysis to the Water Rate Board that will
5 ultimately make the decision of whether and, if
6 so, how much the Water Department's rates are
7 able to increase.

8 So just as sort of a thumbnail sketch of
9 what's on the table here, the Water Department
10 has proposed to raise residential water bills
11 by a little over 17 and a half percent over two
12 years. And for an average residential
13 customer, that amounts to \$140 additional per
14 year for your water service.

15 So we have some concerns about that
16 proposal. We've heard a lot of concerns over
17 the course of this proceeding so far. And we
18 want to hear your concerns about that.

19 And should the Water Department raise your
20 rates during a pandemic? Should it look for
21 ways to lower costs? What about the estimated
22 \$1.4 million in local government recovery funds
23 that Philadelphia is going to get? Shouldn't
24 the City use that to support the Water

1 Department instead of increasing your rates?
2 What would it mean to your family to have to
3 pay more right now for water?

4 And, you know, we've talked a little bit
5 about the programs that are available to help
6 you. Has the City done everything it can to
7 help you access those programs and benefits
8 that may help you afford your bills?

9 So we really want to hear from those of
10 you who have taken the time out of your lives
11 and your schedules and your evening to be here
12 with us today, because what you share will be
13 really an important part of the record.

14 The Board needs to hear from you, the
15 customers, and understand what you think about
16 this request to increase rates and charges.

17 So I want to thank you and encourage
18 anyone who is prepared to speak to share with
19 us this evening.

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you,
21 Mr. Ballenger.

22 Now, there are other parties --
23 participants in this case -- the Philadelphia
24 Water Revenue Board, which does the actual

1 billing and collection on behalf of the Water
2 Department, the Philadelphia Large Users Group,
3 PECO and a number of individuals.

4 As Rob indicated, the Board selected
5 Community Legal Services to represent the
6 interests of residential and small users. And
7 the Board made -- the Water Department made its
8 preliminary filing in January and its final
9 filing in February. And since that time,
10 there's been a lot of activity going on in this
11 case.

12 The Public Advocate has done an amazing
13 amount of discovery, which means they've gone
14 through the filing and asked follow-up kind of
15 questions in asking Company, the Water
16 Department, to support particular requests.
17 All of that is posted on the Rate Board's
18 website and you're welcome to see the questions
19 and the answers.

20 There has been -- like I said,
21 happening -- CLS is very experienced with these
22 kinds of cases. And I think so far has done a
23 very good job of representing you in terms of
24 this.

1 We had a prehearing conference in February
2 to talk about preliminary issues, the schedule,
3 and there's a certain amount of time allowed by
4 regulation that the Rate Board has to make its
5 decision.

6 So to comply with that schedule, testimony
7 from the non-Water Department parties is due
8 Monday, which is when they have a chance to
9 comment on the filing and make their own
10 suggestions as to what the Rate Board should
11 do. There's another round of testimony.
12 They'll be technical hearings at which these
13 parties can present their witnesses to support
14 those statements. That will be probably the
15 end of April.

16 I will hopefully write my report with a
17 recommendation to the Rate Board by the end of
18 May. And the Rate Board will make its decision
19 by the end of June, so that any rate decisions
20 can be recommended by the beginning of the
21 fiscal year, which is September 1.

22 The Rate Board, as I said, selected CLS
23 because of its experience, and they selected me
24 to be the Hearing Officer because of my

1 experience.

2 I have over 25 years' experience with the
3 Public Utility Commission as an Administrative
4 Law Judge, here, in Philadelphia. I've heard
5 hundreds of rate cases. I know everything
6 there is to know about utilities and their
7 regulation -- what a well-run utility looks
8 like. What expenses are reasonable? How
9 should things be done?

10 I also had a lot of experience in case
11 management -- how can we have an efficient
12 equitable process by which all these issues are
13 developed?

14 I also did thousands of inability to pay
15 cases and individual customer complaints. I'm
16 very aware of the situation that people in
17 Philadelphia face with their utilities.

18 In addition to that, I have ten years'
19 experience doing other utility work. I worked
20 for the Public Utility Commission where I was
21 charged with representing the public interest.

22 I spent a couple years with the Office of
23 Consumer Advocate representing residential
24 interests. And I might as well say it, but

1 after I retired, I did some work for some
2 utilities, too, in Philadelphia mainly
3 representing -- advising them on customer
4 service issues.

5 So I really do have a good background.
6 I'm very sensitive to affect on customers of
7 utility actions and regulatory actions. And I
8 hope you understand that I strongly believe
9 that we have to take your interest into
10 account. And we can't just make decisions in a
11 vacuum.

12 Now, the parties will tell you that I have
13 continually stressed that this is not a
14 confrontational kind of a hearing. You may
15 think it's the Company versus the Water
16 Department, but it is not. That's not what it
17 is. And that's not the best way to handle
18 this.

19 It's not a -- it's just not the way you
20 think of litigation. This is more of a
21 collaboration where the Water Department
22 presents its need for a case and the other
23 parties respond to it and get together and
24 resolve it, because it may not seem to at

1 first, you know, when you're first looking at
2 it, but you as customers are very important to
3 the Water Department. They don't want you to
4 have rates you can't pay.

5 It's a lot better if they have rates that
6 are affordable, because then they don't have to
7 deal with the collection and termination and,
8 to be honest, dealing with unhappy customers.
9 They don't want you filing complaints. They
10 want you to be satisfied with their service and
11 they want you to be okay with your bills.

12 Now, you, as customer, of course you want
13 affordable rates, but you're also entitled to
14 adequate service. You don't want the company
15 cutting corners.

16 So while it seems that these are two
17 different kinds of interest, they really are
18 the same. You want that point where the Water
19 Department has enough money to do its
20 operations efficiently and give you good
21 service and you pay rates that are just enough
22 to let them do that, but not more.

23 So I see this as a collaboration. And I
24 would hope almost like meeting on a bridge,

1 where there's a midpoint where these interests
2 can all be accommodated.

3 So just -- that is my philosophy. And I
4 would like to think that's one of the reasons
5 why I was selected by the Rate Board, because I
6 do see this as possibly a productive exercise.
7 Nobody wants to waste anybody's time or money.
8 We just want a result that's fair. And I do
9 believe that an equitable process produces a
10 result that is equitable.

11 So in that spirit, I'm going to talk
12 about -- I'm going to ask you to give your
13 statement today. Let's talk about the process
14 to do that.

15 We have -- people have registered, and
16 I'll go through that, but if you haven't
17 registered, you can still express your opinion.
18 We will take you at this time. Hopefully,
19 there will be time.

20 You don't have to make a statement here
21 tonight. You can send your comments or
22 concerns directly to the Rate Board. We post
23 them on the website. And I promise you I read
24 every, single one of them. People have done

1 that or you can send a letter to the Rate
2 Board.

3 As I'm sure you're all aware, there is
4 this pandemic ongoing. It's a public health
5 emergency. So all hearings are held remotely.
6 This one, as well as the hearings that will be
7 held in April, if the hearings are necessary.
8 And you're certainly welcome to observe both,
9 as well. Notices will be posted on the Rate
10 Board's website.

11 Now, this was -- doing it virtually is new
12 to me and new to the Rate Board and I think the
13 Water Department, but having public hearing is
14 not. And there are a lot of activities in
15 terms of outreach that both the Company and the
16 Public Advocate undertook to make sure that
17 people are aware that these hearings were being
18 conducted. And I'm kind of curious to see
19 which of those things worked.

20 So when I call you up to testify, I'm
21 going to ask you to give your name and spell it
22 for the benefit of the court reporter. I'm
23 going to ask for your address. I'm going to
24 ask if you're representing yourself or a group.

1 And I'm also going to ask how did you hear
2 about this? Was it through social media? Did
3 you get an e-mail? Were you talking to
4 someone, word of mouth -- just so we know what
5 works and what doesn't work.

6 We're not going to set a time limit on
7 your talking. I just hope that you'll be
8 respectful of other people so that we can get
9 to everybody, because we want everybody to be
10 heard. It's very important that that happen.

11 And just to show that it is important that
12 you be seen and heard, I'll note that the
13 Chairman of the Rate Board is present,
14 Mr. Popowsky is here, watching it, watching us,
15 I guess, and he's going to take to heart what
16 you have to say.

17 As Mr. Abrams indicated, if you have a
18 personal issue or a service complaint or a
19 billing issue, you really don't want to discuss
20 that in public. We can arrange for you to
21 enter a breakout room and talk directly with
22 the Company and try to resolve your problem or
23 get contact information, at least, so that they
24 can do that.

1 second, please.

2 Could you please state and spell your name
3 for the record?

4 MR. SKIENDZIELEWSKI: I'm sorry. For the
5 record, my name is Michael Skiendzielewski.
6 I'm a lifelong Philly resident and PWD customer
7 who's been before the Water Rate Board before.

8 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Your
9 address, please?

10 MR. SKIENDZIELEWSKI: Oh. 516 Parkhollow
11 Lane, Philadelphia, PA 19111.

12 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And you're
13 appearing on your own behalf?

14 MR. SKIENDZIELEWSKI: My issues is -- I'm
15 speaking -- a cover of many, many people
16 because it has to do with ethics and integrity.

17 Anything else I need to put down on the
18 record?

19 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: No. I would
20 ask you to confine your remarks to the issues,
21 which are the subject of this proceeding, as
22 you know from your prior experience. But go
23 ahead.

24 MR. SKIENDZIELEWSKI: I have to mention a

1 couple words you used in your presentation,
2 Ms. Chestnut.

3 You mentioned collaboration. That's what
4 you wish. And in my particular set of
5 circumstances, that's what I've wished for a
6 number of years.

7 But to describe -- to expect or think or
8 believe that from the Water Department and
9 Water Revenue Board and the City officials and
10 attorneys, a collaborative focus and philosophy
11 is just not there. It's just not there.

12 And the other words you mentioned were
13 fair and equitable. It's interesting. I have
14 mentioned fair, equitable and reasonable any
15 number of times over the past six years with
16 regard to these issues, okay?

17 But separate from that, my things have to
18 do immediately with -- and you know what they
19 are about. And I will submit some things for
20 the record that we've posted.

21 Throughout the City departments, we have
22 integrity officers. Each department has an
23 integrity officer that reports to the inspector
24 general. For the past two and half weeks, I've

1 asked the Water Revenue Board deputy
2 commissioner for the name of the integrity
3 officer so that I could submit allegations of
4 financial impropriety. Financial impropriety
5 is something that speaks to water rates.

6 So I see that she's listed here. I would
7 like to know the name of the integrity officer
8 for the Water Revenue Bureau.

9 (No response.)

10 MR. SKIENDZIELEWSKI: Can you hear me?

11 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Who is speaking
12 for the WRB? Is that you, Ms. Crosby, or who?

13 MR. DASENT: I was going to wait for the
14 end to respond.

15 We provided the name of Lisa Brett, who is
16 chief integrity officer for PWD, to
17 Mr. Skiendzielewski and I've indicated --

18 MR. SKIENDZIELEWSKI: Who is speaking now,
19 please?

20 MR. DASENT: Andre Dasent.

21 MR. SKIENDZIELEWSKI: Mr. Dasent, I have
22 that information. That's the Philadelphia
23 Water Department.

24 I asked for the integrity officer of the

1 Water Revenue Bureau. You were aware of my
2 request. You're aware of the repetitive
3 nature --

4 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.
5 Ms. Crosby, can you answer that or can somebody
6 else here --

7 MR. SKIENDZIELEWSKI: Ms. Crosby, the
8 e-mail --

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Hold on a
10 second, sir. I'm speaking.

11 MS. CROSBY: Good evening, Judge Chestnut.
12 I'm represented in this proceeding by
13 (inaudible.)

14 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Can someone
15 give a name or do you want to get back to
16 Mr. Skiendzielewski?

17 MR. DASENT: I'll provide a name later. I
18 can find out in short order.

19 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: That's fine.
20 Go ahead, Mr. Skiendzielewski.

21 MR. SKIENDZIELEWSKI: Do you have
22 oversight for the Water Revenue Bureau?

23 MR. DASENT: We haven't planned on a
24 question-and-answer panel.

1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Yeah.

2 Mr. Skiendzielewski, this is just a statement.

3 If you can answer quickly, yes or no, but
4 I don't want to get into anything further.

5 MR. SKIENDZIELEWSKI: Ms. Chestnut, I do
6 appreciate -- I'm ending my inquiry now.

7 But it has to do with -- I know what the
8 Board is about in terms of these issues have to
9 be related to financial water rate issues.

10 The things that are -- that have been
11 brought up before and will be brought up again
12 impact water rates.

13 Philadelphia Water Department help loans,
14 according to State Law, the City is not
15 responsible for that. They have given out
16 discounts.

17 And despite numerous and unending efforts
18 for people to review that and the billion
19 dollar agency not to think it's significant
20 enough to review and investigate reports, that
21 calls into question all of their decisions.

22 But anyhow, I thank you for listening. I
23 wanted it on the record that I was asking for
24 the name of the integrity officer, asking

1 directly to the deputy commissioner of the
2 Water Revenue Bureau, and failed over and over
3 and over and over again to provide the name.

4 We aren't interested in integrity ethics
5 and corruption. We have a difficult matter in
6 front of us.

7 Thank you, Ms. Chestnut. I appreciate
8 your efforts there in this regard, but this is
9 not collaboration.

10 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I'm sorry. I
11 don't know what to say, but okay.

12 MR. SKIENDZIELEWSKI: This is not about
13 you. This is about the Company, the
14 institution, the organization.

15 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

16 MR. SKIENDZIELEWSKI: Excuse me.

17 I come from a career where accountability
18 and transparency in review is 24 hours a day.
19 It is clear that many of these officials, high
20 rank, high paid, have never seen the light of
21 accountability. So thank you. I thank you
22 very much.

23 And I'm sorry that maybe these were off
24 target but I wanted it on the record that

1 Ms. Crosby refuses adamantly to provide the
2 name that's necessary. Thank you. Bye.

3 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I'm not sure
4 that that's a fair characterization, but okay.
5 It will speak for itself, okay.

6 MR. DASENT: Judge Chestnut --

7 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Yes?

8 MR. DASENT: -- just so the record is
9 full, we will get the name of this chief
10 integrity officer from WRB, just --

11 MR. SKIENDZIELEWSKI: If you have to get
12 it, it's a scam.

13 MR. DASENT: No. It's a question. I'll
14 ask it and I will get back to you.

15 MR. SKIENDZIELEWSKI: Please. Don't
16 insult the parties here.

17 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I don't
18 understand why Mr. Dasent can't just send you
19 an e-mail.

20 MR. DASENT: I have to ask the question
21 and get it to you.

22 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Steven?

23 MR. LIANG: Barbara Panzano registered for
24 March 16 at 6, but she appears to be here now.

1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

2 Could you state and a spell your name for
3 the record, please?

4 MS. PANZANO: Barbara Panzano,
5 P-A-N-Z-A-N-O.

6 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And your
7 address, please?

8 MS. PANZANO: 2609 Eddington Street,
9 E-D-D-I-N-G-T-O-N, Philadelphia, PA 19137.

10 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And how did you
11 hear about this hearing?

12 MS. PANZANO: By e-mail.

13 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Sorry. I
14 forgot to ask.

15 Are you appearing on your own behalf or
16 for a group?

17 MS. PANZANO: No. I'm on my own behalf.

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Go ahead
19 then, please.

20 MS. PANZANO: Okay. I've been in this
21 house since 1984. And years ago, we used to
22 pay like every three months for our water bill.
23 And it was very reasonable. And then it became
24 once a month. And it has gradually become the

1 highest bill that I pay a month. It is more
2 than my electric. And it's more than my gas.
3 And I have gas heating. I have gas cooking. I
4 have a gas dryer and a gas water heater.

5 But my water bill is higher than all of
6 them. And I really think that's unreasonable.
7 And I think there must be inefficiency
8 somewhere, but all we hear about is more
9 increases and more increases and more
10 increases.

11 And I don't think the other two utilities
12 are doing a bad job, but they are cheaper than
13 the Water Department. And I don't think they
14 are letting things go. And I think they are
15 doing a good job on what they're supposed to
16 do, so there's no excuse for these rates just
17 increasing and increasing and increasing.
18 Something has to cut back somewhere.

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Amen.

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Steven, you
21 need to take care of that.

22 MR. LIANG: Okay. Who was that?

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I think that
24 was Claudia Sheradon.

1 MS. SHERADON: Yes, it was.

2 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I don't know if
3 I mentioned this, but after everybody has given
4 their statement I'm going to ask Mr. Dasent or
5 Ms. Scott or Mr. Ballenger or, actually,
6 anybody has any questions.

7 Now, this is not to cross-examine you or
8 to embarrass you, but if they want to clarify
9 or follow up on something you said, I'd like to
10 give them a chance, okay?

11 Mr. Dasent or Mr. Ballenger?

12 MR. BALLENGER: He's muted, so I'll just
13 go ahead and say thank you for your testimony
14 this evening, Ms. Panzano, and no questions
15 from me.

16 MR. DASENT: Thank you, Ms. Panzano, also,
17 for testifying.

18 And if you have questions of the
19 Department and you can leave your contact
20 information in the chat or share your e-mail, I
21 can --

22 MS. PANZANO: He froze.

23 MR. BALLENGER: I think he froze out.

24 Do you want to leave your contact

1 information? I think he's back.

2 MS. PANZANO: I just wanted to make the
3 statement, basically. I wanted someone besides
4 myself to hear my complaints.

5 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Well,
6 Ms. Panzano, we certainly appreciate it, but
7 maybe the Company can do something to help you.

8 MS. PANZANO: Okay. I'll leave my contact
9 info.

10 MR. DASENT: Perfect. Thank you very
11 much.

12 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you.

13 That takes us to Beatrice Sovich is next
14 on the list.

15 MR. LIANG: I think I got an e-mail from
16 her a little bit ago that she wouldn't be able
17 to make it -- to this hearing.

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Next
19 person I have is Dana Hirshenbalm.

20 MR. LIANG: Yep. That's who I have.

21 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Are you here?

22 (No response.)

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I'll come back
24 and maybe they'll be here.

1 Okay. Who do you have next, Steven?

2 MR. LIANG: Michelle Deboer. I think I
3 saw her.

4 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I think I saw
5 her, too -- oh. There you are.

6 MS. DEBOER: I'm Michelle Deboer.

7 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Could
8 you please spell your name for the record?

9 MS. DEBOER: M-I-C-H-E-L-L-E, D-E-B-O-E-R.

10 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And your
11 address, please?

12 MS. DEBOER: 1240 South 18th Street,
13 19146.

14 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And are you
15 appearing on your own behalf or for a group?

16 MS. DEBOER: I'm making a statement on my
17 own behalf.

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And how did you
19 hear about this?

20 MS. DEBOER: I discovered the information
21 about the Water Rate Board when I was
22 attempting to get information to clarify my own
23 situation with the Water Department. And I saw
24 there were public meetings. And I also reached

1 out to the Community Legal Services, because
2 they were noted as the advocates.

3 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Go
4 ahead.

5 MS. DEBOER: Okay. Your Honor, thank you
6 for the opportunity to share an abbreviated
7 summary of my experience and some of my
8 concerns as they relate to the rate increases
9 and adjustments being proposed.

10 I can assure you that I am a real person
11 and that the decisions of the Rate Board and
12 the Water Department all contribute and have an
13 impact on us.

14 And my biggest concern is that my ability
15 to pay for my current water bills -- yes,
16 multiple water bills for my one property --
17 when the Department is asking for more when
18 there's already concerns about transparency and
19 equity and fairness amongst the charges made
20 for residents and businesses, I think that it's
21 concerning.

22 I was -- a little bit of background, I was
23 teaching in D.C. and I came here 12 years ago
24 to visit a girlfriend. And I fell in love with

1 a boy. And he made me fall in love with
2 Philadelphia. And now here we are, married
3 with two kids, living in our house. It was a
4 big deal.

5 I'm a teacher for the School District of
6 Philadelphia.

7 And as soon as we bought the house, there
8 was a pay freeze. And everything kind of fell
9 apart at the same time. So we weren't quite
10 making not enough to get the assistance through
11 other supports and we were making just enough
12 to make sure that the bills came out right at
13 the right time when the paychecks went in.

14 And financially, it's tough. And there's
15 a lot of people that are living like that.
16 They are waiting for the paycheck to hit before
17 the bills get paid. And even through all of
18 that, it's tough.

19 But right after I had my second child, I
20 realized that getting two bills was not a
21 normal thing. And that was -- I called and
22 asked if I could have them combined. They
23 said: Nope. You can't have them combined.
24 There's not something that -- we can't do that.

1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Excuse me, can
2 I just ask you a question? Two bills for what?
3 I'm kind of confused. Two water bills?

4 MS. DEBOER: Yeah. I get two water bills
5 from the Water Department. One is for water
6 usage, storm water and service fees. And the
7 other one was just storm water.

8 And so they -- the second account was --
9 it varied. The storm water one was different
10 fees. I always paid it. And I didn't think
11 about it.

12 And my information got to someone in the
13 accounting department. And the determination
14 was made that the charges on the second account
15 were an error -- oops. We shouldn't have been
16 charging you on the second account. Don't
17 worry. We're going to close it. So they
18 closed it. I didn't see any of the money that
19 I paid to that account.

20 And then they said: Oh. And by the way,
21 upon further review, we're creating a third
22 account for you. And that was based on a
23 Google Image search of my home. They said that
24 I have not been paying for a monthly fire

1 service charge for my sprinkler system that was
2 required when my house was built in 2011,
3 but -- I don't know if it's still a
4 requirement.

5 But the letter was very nice. And it
6 said: We're going -- sorry that we haven't
7 been charging you. Our mistake. But we're
8 going to back bill you for four years and they
9 sent me a bill for \$1,140.20 two weeks before
10 Christmas. So I had an infant and a toddler
11 and a \$1,200 bill that I earned like that.

12 So I called. I got transferred.
13 Voicemail boxes were full. I couldn't find
14 anything online. I had no idea what this
15 sprinkler fire charge was for. It was 25, 26
16 now it's 27, but I was completely overwhelmed.

17 I spent an entire hour in my car crying
18 hysterically, because I had no clue how I was
19 going to pay it. I didn't know what pocket to
20 empty when they were already empty.

21 But the bills kept coming -- two envelopes
22 every month. And they continue to come from
23 the Water Department.

24 Anyone that has a sprinkler system -- but

1 it's not really everyone that has a sprinkler
2 systems. It's only ones that they've realized
3 or accounted for -- and so everything in terms
4 of documentation varies.

5 But I don't -- it hurt, because I didn't
6 feel like I could trust anything. Some people
7 are getting a bill and some people aren't.

8 And that worries me because, you know, as
9 a public utility, I'm just sending money and
10 I'm hoping it goes to the right place. And I
11 can't be sure that that's accurate. So it's a
12 huge clerical issue for the Water Department,
13 but, you know, for me, it was more than just a
14 clerical issue. Like it impacted me in a huge
15 way.

16 And so that kind of oversight is
17 concerning, because if my -- because there was
18 no transparency for the charges on the water
19 bill, because I didn't understand what I was
20 being charged for.

21 And that they say the website -- it took
22 me some digging. In chapter four, the monthly
23 service charges for the furnishing of water for
24 the purpose of fire protection -- and that's

1 \$27 and change for up to a 4 inch connection --
2 I never thought that I would be saying these
3 kinds of thing. This is really not my wheel
4 house, so I'm trying, here.

5 I've got a 2 inch connection. So that's
6 half of my water bill. My water bill is 55 and
7 I'm paying 28 for a sprinkler system that
8 doesn't even have water running through it. It
9 just sits. It's stagnant -- in the event of an
10 emergency, which I'm very thankful for.

11 But having a completely separate bill and
12 no transparency of what it's for and saying
13 it's for your safety -- I believe in our fire
14 department. And I'm glad that I have a
15 sprinkler system, but that's a lot of money.

16 And then they said: Well, you get a
17 discount. You get a discount on your
18 homeowner's insurance. It's \$84 a year
19 discount I get for having a sprinkler system.

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Ms. Deboer, I
21 can absolutely understand how stressful this
22 whole thing is for you -- and anybody in that
23 situation, absolutely. And I can understand
24 your concern about the difficulty of

1 understanding what it is you're being charged
2 and having confidence you're being charged
3 correctly.

4 With respect to your particular situation,
5 I can't imagine that if you talk directly to
6 the Company, there's not something they can
7 help you with.

8 Is that okay with you, Mr. Dasent?

9 MR. DASENT: Yes. I'd like that
10 opportunity.

11 And we can even do a breakout room right
12 now -- if someone from the -- if Glen Abrams
13 and someone from the Water Revenue Bureau could
14 join Ms. Deboer.

15 It just seems like we could talk through
16 at least getting contact information and follow
17 up on your concerns.

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Is that okay
19 with you?

20 MS. DEBOER: Absolutely. I mean, I don't
21 want it to be a complete, you know -- I wrote
22 it down and deleted it and I'm going to say it
23 anyway, but every single person that's driving
24 around in a white truck, in a white van or an

1 SUV -- there are lovely and wonderful people
2 that work for the Water Department. They are
3 friendly. They are nice. They are kind. I
4 appreciate that. It feels like they are
5 servicing a community.

6 And when you pick up the phone and call
7 customer service, it's just defeating and
8 there's no answers and it's this round about
9 thing.

10 MR. DASENT: Let's see if we can cure
11 that.

12 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you for
13 sharing your experience. I know it's
14 distressing, really.

15 Hopefully you can talk directly to the
16 Company and they can help you. And maybe get
17 some ideas from you on helping other people in
18 your situation, too.

19 MS. DEBOER: I appreciate it.

20 The rates that are associate -- I know the
21 rates are going to go down a bit with this
22 proposal, but in terms of just looking at other
23 areas, the rates at \$27 a month -- even some
24 other large cities like Baltimore -- here, it

1 would be \$330 a year at this rate. In
2 Baltimore, Maryland, it's \$168 a year. In
3 Denver, Colorado, it's \$6.37 a month.

4 A lot of places charge a monthly fee that
5 is under \$15.

6 And so for a 2 inch line, I'm concerned
7 about some of the rates. And for a residential
8 single-family home -- I'm not creating revenue
9 out of my house. I'm making lesson plans and
10 folding paper for my kids. It's an extremely
11 high rate to charge someone.

12 MR. DASENT: Let's try to work through
13 this.

14 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Can you set
15 them up?

16 MR. DASENT: I see Ravon and I hope Glen
17 will join, also. Danielle Lavery is here,
18 also. Those three folks can help.

19 MR. BALLENGER: And before you all go, I
20 just want to -- on behalf of the Public
21 Advocate, thank you Ms. Deboer, for sharing
22 your story here tonight. I think it raises an
23 interesting issue that hasn't come up before
24 about -- really, about a rate design issue. So

1 I think it's something we should all be mindful
2 of.

3 MR. LIANG: I'll create the room now.

4 MR. DASENT: Thank you.

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I just wanted to
6 know -- is this the end of the meeting?

7 MR. LIANG: No, no. There's more time
8 after the registered participants.

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Yes.

10 MR. LIANG: There was one more registered.

11 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Is that
12 Mr. Wallace?

13 MR. DASENT: Yeah. Ivan Wallace.

14 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Mr. Wallace,
15 are you here?

16 (No response.)

17 MR. DASENT: If he's not, then I did have
18 Victoria as the next person to speak.

19 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Mr. Wallace, if
20 you're on a phone, you have to un-mute
21 yourself, because I do not see you online.

22 MR. WALLACE: Workers Benefit Council,
23 Ivan Wallace.

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We've already heard

1 from the Workers Benefit Council several times,
2 so I'm not going to hear you again.

3 MR. WALLACE: Okay.

4 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Unless you want
5 to testify as an individual.

6 I've already heard from them, okay?

7 MR. WALLACE: Can I speak?

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Mr. Wallace has a
9 testimony for himself.

10 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: He can testify
11 for himself, but like I said, it's really not a
12 productive use of time to have to go over this
13 yet again, because I understood the points --

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Everybody has a
15 different story.

16 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Mr. Wallace?

17 MR. WALLACE: Yes? Hello.

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Could you
19 please state and spell your name for the
20 record?

21 MR. WALLACE: Yes. I-V-A-N,
22 W-A-L-L-A-C-E.

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And your
24 address, please?

1 MR. WALLACE: 5452 Lebanon Avenue
2 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19131.

3 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Do you want to
4 give a statement on your own behalf as a
5 customer?

6 MR. WALLACE: Yes. Hello. My name is
7 Ivan Wallace. I've been a long-time resident
8 of Philadelphia. At one time I lived in
9 Washington, D.C. I'm a retired health
10 physicist from the NIH.

11 And also, when I came back to
12 Philadelphia, I did work as an educator for a
13 side program that the Water Department
14 sponsored teaching environmental science at the
15 Overbrook Arts and Environmental Center on
16 Lancaster Avenue.

17 Right now, I'm basically a raw food
18 caterer. And I teach healthy eating.

19 And I'm here to really testify about, you
20 know, some struggles I had, really, with paying
21 my water bill, gas bill and some health issues
22 that happened shortly after I returned to
23 Philadelphia.

24 I had a struggle with tripping in the

1 street. Fell into a bus. Had a stroke and a
2 heart attack. And when I recovered from that,
3 I, basically -- really just had, you know,
4 time, really, just in a rehab facility, you
5 know, really just struggling, trying to get my
6 speech back, my balance back. And finally, I
7 did really, you know, recover. And, you know,
8 really just had trouble paying the bills.

9 But for the most part, you know, the -- my
10 water has been cut off maybe three times. And
11 I really could not really, you know, find the,
12 you know, the sympathy from the Water
13 Department, you know, really just trying to get
14 notes to keep it on.

15 But subsequently, a few years before my
16 incident, when I first came back to
17 Philadelphia, I must regress that taking care
18 of my mother in like 2007, she had a series of
19 strokes and dealing with, you know, coming back
20 here and dealing with the property, we had to
21 admit her to the hospital -- a rehab facility.

22 And she had been out of the property for
23 almost a year and a half. And her water bill
24 had been rising. And we basically didn't

1 really have people in the house and the Water
2 Department --

3 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Mr. Wallace,
4 could you please talk about the Water
5 Department and the proposed filing?

6 MR. WALLACE: Okay.

7 The Water Department, basically, could not
8 really tell me why the bill was rising on the
9 property. And I kept calling about, you know,
10 why my rate's really rising. And they couldn't
11 even tell me, you know, did I have a leak in
12 the property or in the street.

13 So in the winter that passed, there was
14 basically freezing in the street. And -- so
15 there was a leak in the street, but
16 technically, I was told that, you know, I had
17 to get a private plumber to come dig up the
18 street.

19 But at first, it wasn't told that it was
20 my property or the property next door. So one
21 winter passed, you know, there still was a
22 leak. The second winter passed. We had to get
23 the street dug up. And we basically was
24 attached a \$3,500 bill. And the next winter

1 came and there still was a leak in the street.

2 And the property next door was the problem.

3 So, you know, both houses basically got a
4 3,000 bill that was attached to two properties
5 on the street. And the street really still has
6 a ditch from whoever really was the contractor
7 that dug up the street.

8 They did a poor job even really patching
9 up the job that was done where, you know,
10 Lebanon Avenue still had -- the pavement wasn't
11 really, you know, repatched up from -- the
12 whole process of re-piping -- I mean, the whole
13 thing of like re-piping the sewer system is
14 really like being thrown back on -- the
15 infrastructure is really being thrown back on
16 the customer where it comes down to, you know,
17 what really is, you know, what really is the
18 homeowner's expense or the City's expense. It
19 seemed like it was an unfair treatment.

20 And personally, my problem was really with
21 the care of my mother, that thing stressed her
22 out to the point where, you know, I think her
23 death was even caused from the stress of, you
24 know, just dealing with that at an old age.

1 She couldn't even enjoy her retirement.

2 Back to the whole thing on throwing the
3 cost on the infrastructure, that was really
4 unfair. And I think that, you know, the ditch
5 that was left in street is really still a major
6 problem that I know a lot of people that are
7 still dealing with this infrastructure problem
8 needs to really, you know, it's really just a
9 problem that, you know --

10 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Let me see if I
11 understand this.

12 Is it still -- is the street still open?
13 Is it still an issue in the street?

14 MR. WALLACE: It's not open, but the tar
15 and basically where -- the patch up job is not
16 really --

17 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: It's a poor
18 patch job?

19 MR. WALLACE: It's a poor patch job.

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: That's nothing
21 the Company can address?

22 MR. DASENT: I'd like to talk with this
23 gentleman about this a little more --

24 Mr. Wallace, I'm sorry.

1 And if you can leave your contact
2 information or if you care to join me -- I
3 think it will be easiest if you left your name
4 in the chat and I can reach out to you.

5 MR. WALLACE: Yeah, I can.

6 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And hopefully,
7 that can get resolved.

8 MR. DASENT: Yeah. I just would like to
9 address and make sure we understand the nature
10 of the problem is it's resurfacing -- the area
11 that was dug up, those sorts of things.

12 But it seems like it may even boil down to
13 the responsibility of the customer for certain
14 areas of service, like the service line. And
15 we need to explain that a little better so that
16 you understand what your responsibility is,
17 what our responsibility is.

18 And if it's our responsibility, we need to
19 make sure the job is done correctly.

20 MR. BALLENGER: Can I ask a couple of
21 questions --

22 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Absolutely.

23 MR. BALLENGER: -- just to make sure.

24 Mr. Wallace, you mentioned you had like a

1 \$3,000 bill. Was that because you used a help
2 loan from the City to make the repair?

3 MR. WALLACE: Well, I don't think it
4 was -- I don't know if it was a loan. It was
5 basically just attached with the payment that
6 was, you know, it was basically just a, you
7 know, it came with the assistance of what
8 really just happened when they dug up the
9 street.

10 And it was just added to the bill when the
11 procedure happened, so I don't know if it was a
12 loan or you know?

13 MR. BALLENGER: Okay. And the Water
14 Department's billing you every month for that
15 repair; is that right?

16 MR. WALLACE: Yes, yes.

17 As a matter of fact, my sister, her
18 property -- it just happened with her over in
19 Overbrook Farms.

20 She basically got something done. It was
21 said that her piping was, you know, faulty.
22 And they dug up her piping to the house. And
23 she has same issue, really, right now. It's a
24 \$3,000 bill over in Overbrook Farms right now.

1 It's almost like its happening all over
2 the space. The infrastructure is really a
3 problem.

4 MR. BALLENGER: Sure. Yes, Mr. Wallace,
5 it is.

6 And it sounds like your neighbor then --
7 it was actually your neighbor's pipe that was
8 leaking?

9 MR. WALLACE: And basically the whole
10 neighborhood was really just looking at us,
11 because people couldn't even walk to their cars
12 for two consecutive winters because it was a
13 sheet of ice just blanketing down a quarter of
14 the block of where we live. It was really a
15 hazard for the whole neighborhood, really,
16 those two winters.

17 Thank you Mr. Ballenger and Ms. Scott,
18 because -- the happy part was I got connected
19 to you all. And I found out about the TAP
20 program. And that really works. I think
21 that's the good part. I'm on the TAP and that
22 is a blessing. So I basically have relief and
23 that is a blessing.

24 And I can basically say that ESWA put me

1 in touch with Mr. Ballenger and Attorney Scott.

2 And that is the high point of my testimony.

3 Thank you for --

4 MR. BALLENGER: That's very kind,
5 Mr. Wallace. I want to thank you for joining
6 us and sharing your story. And I hope that
7 the -- you can take advantage of an opportunity
8 with the Water Department to talk about these
9 issues.

10 MR. DASENT: We have someone for a
11 breakout room, Steven, Ms. Kersey, K-E-R-S-E-Y.
12 Do you see that? Let me make sure I spelled
13 her name right.

14 MR. LIANG: K-E-R-S-E-Y?

15 MR. DASENT: Yep.

16 And if we can get your contact information
17 to follow up, that would be very helpful,
18 Mr. Wallace. Thank you.

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Hello?

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Hold on a
21 second, please.

22 MR. DASENT: We've run into a glitch,
23 Mr. Wallace.

24 Can you put your name into the chat?

1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Mr. Wallace,
2 can you just input your e-mail address or your
3 contact information in the chat box? I think
4 that might be easier.

5 Do we have his e-mail?

6 MR. DASENT: I can get it from Steven, as
7 well.

8 MR. LIANG: He left me a voicemail. He
9 didn't send an e-mail.

10 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: That's okay.

11 Mr. Wallace, Mr. Dasent can call you or
12 someone from the Water Department can call you
13 directly, how's that?

14 MR. WALLACE: Okay. That will work.

15 MR. DASENT: Thank you very much.

16 MR. LIANG: To the person that was calling
17 in on the phone, there's currently a list of
18 people waiting to speak, so I can add you to
19 it.

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you.

21 MR. LIANG: Can I just have your name?

22 MS. BATTS: Yes. It's Antonia,

23 A-N-T-O-N-I-A, Batts, B-A-T-T-S.

24 MR. LIANG: Okay. Thank you.

1 I'm going to put you on mute for now, but
2 once it's your turn, I'll ask you to un-mute.

3 Next up, I believe, would be Victoria
4 Alfred.

5 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Victoria
6 Alfred-Levow?

7 MS. ALFRED-LEVOW: So my name is Victoria
8 Alfred-Levow

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Could you
10 please spell that for the record?

11 MS. ALFRED-LEVOW: Sure. Victoria,
12 V-I-C-T-O-R-I-A. And my last name is
13 Alfred-Levow, one word but hyphenated. And it
14 is A-L-F-R-E-D, dash, L-E-V-O-W.

15 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And your
16 address, please?

17 MS. ALFRED-LEVOW: 3424 Henry Avenue,
18 19129.

19 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And are you
20 appearing on your own behalf or for a group?

21 MS. ALFRED-LEVOW: On my own behalf.

22 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And how did you
23 hear about this?

24 MS. ALFRED-LEVOW: I heard about it,

1 actually, a few different ways. I got an
2 e-mail from a group called Reclaim Philadelphia
3 about these hearings. And I also read an
4 Inquirer article by a reporter who, I think, is
5 actually in this chat right now.

6 But like one of the first links was about
7 the rate increase.

8 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Go ahead then,
9 please.

10 MS. ALFRED-LEVOW: Sure. First of all,
11 thank you so much to everyone else who
12 testified before me. It was really impactful
13 to hear your stories of what's been going on
14 with your relationship with the Water
15 Department.

16 I definitely have not lived in
17 Philadelphia as long as many of the residents
18 on the call. I grew up outside of Philadelphia
19 in Lower Merion and just moved to Philadelphia
20 this September.

21 And my dad has been helping me out with
22 rent and bills, but that is going to end next
23 September, when, obviously, I'll be responsible
24 for bills on my own. And I know that I will

1 probably be working a job in the hospitality
2 industry, which, I'm hoping, I'll be able to
3 get a good salary, but I know that that's not
4 guaranteed if I take hourly positions.

5 So just thinking about 140 more dollars
6 over a year is, you know, that's like groceries
7 for a month.

8 And just -- I think that Mr. Ballenger
9 mentioned it before. And he was also quoted in
10 the Inquirer saying this, but I don't believe
11 that the only place for the Water Department to
12 receive the funds -- they very much need to
13 make sure that we're all safe and drinking
14 clean water. I don't think that I need to be
15 the one to help them out with that. I don't
16 think that anyone else who has given testimony
17 is necessarily coming from a place where they
18 can do that.

19 And it's important to pay money to your
20 municipal utility because there are those
21 maintenance fees.

22 And I actually live right across from the
23 reservoir and have grown pretty interested in
24 why Philly tap water tastes the way it does and

1 how it is completely safe, but that the Water
2 Department has their PR issues.

3 And I think another, you know, possible
4 issue is that I didn't really know about the
5 possibility for healthcare during a pandemic
6 and didn't know that these opportunities are
7 out there.

8 So it's just kind of frustrating to me
9 that although the aid packages exist, you have
10 to be in a place where you can find out about
11 them.

12 And then in the meantime -- there are 40
13 participants still on this call. There were a
14 few more that left, but there are thousands of
15 other people to whom this \$140 is really going
16 to matter.

17 And considering that the stimulus money is
18 coming to Philadelphia and we still have to
19 figure out where that's actually going while
20 also considering that there are plenty of other
21 cities who have found their own ways to make
22 their rates a little bit lower and possibly
23 fairer for their citizens.

24 I think that -- I know that the

1 Philadelphia Water Department is working really
2 hard every day to make sure that the tap water
3 that I drink and try to convince my friends
4 that it's safe to drink -- that they are really
5 trying to monitor for our safety. And I also
6 think that in order to do that, there's not
7 necessarily a need to look at the consumer
8 first. There has to be somewhere else within.

9 I believe in the article it mentions that
10 we do have emergency reserves, which they are
11 reluctant to bend down, because it's hard not
12 having a backup. But this would be the time to
13 use the backup, considering that so many people
14 are really behind on their water bills.

15 My personal situation right now, I don't
16 have to face this, but I know that I will soon.

17 And I really appreciate living in
18 Philadelphia. It's been a great change from
19 the suburbs. And I plan to stay here for as
20 long as possible, hopefully working in the
21 hospitality industry, and meeting people from
22 all over the City who always have something to
23 teach, always have something to give.

24 And I think that in this case, we don't

1 need to be giving extra money to the
2 Philadelphia Water Department -- if it can come
3 from another place.

4 But also, I agree with what you said,
5 Judge Chestnut, that hopefully this is a place
6 where we're all coming to achieve fairness and
7 we're all hoping to work together in order to
8 get people to be safe and have their water
9 bills where they need to be.

10 Thank you, Judge Chestnut, and everyone
11 else who showed up today. And -- yeah. Thank
12 you very much.

13 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you very
14 much for taking the time and sharing your
15 thoughts with us. We appreciate it.

16 Does anyone have any questions for
17 Ms. Alfred-Levow?

18 MR. DASENT: No, but thank you for
19 participating. We appreciate it.

20 MR. BALLENGER: Same here. Thank you for
21 testifying this evening.

22 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Steven,
23 who's next?

24 MR. LIANG: The next up, I think, would be

1 Constance. She's had her hand up for a while.

2 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

3 MS. DAY: Good evening.

4 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Could you
5 please give and spell your name for the record?

6 MS. DAY: My name is Constance Day,
7 C-O-N-S-T-A-N-C-E. Last name is Day, D-A-Y.

8 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And your
9 address, please?

10 MS. DAY: 4429 North 9th Street,
11 Philadelphia 19140.

12 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Are you
13 appearing on your own behalf or for a group?

14 MS. DAY: More or less on my own behalf
15 for a group, that they don't know about yet.

16 I happen to be the block captain of the
17 4400 block of North 9th Street in the Hunting
18 Park section of the City. My husband and I
19 have been residents in this community for over
20 30 years and in our home since 1985.

21 And I heard about this forum through an
22 e-mail from one of the other community
23 organizations in the area.

24 I found it to be very interesting

1 testimony. The young lady with the multiple
2 bills that was coming in, I was really -- it
3 was really tugging at my heart.

4 But I appreciate the platform that's been
5 provided.

6 For informational purposes, I decided to
7 get on just to glean what was happening so that
8 I could share with my neighbors.

9 I have a few seniors on the block,
10 homeowners. And they always would call for one
11 thing or another -- thinking the block captain
12 has all power. I try to do my best to help to
13 meet the needs of the seniors -- if they need
14 food or if they need extra cash, we try to hope
15 to meet that need.

16 And I do know that bills are always a
17 hardship on the seniors. Myself and my
18 husband, we are seniors as well. Fortunately,
19 we've been blessed to be able to manage our
20 expenses. And this is -- it wasn't done
21 overnight. It was over a long period of time
22 of managing a budget.

23 So, out of useful information going
24 forward, and who I can share -- or which

1 direction I can turn my neighbors to in the
2 event that they do need help in that area with
3 their water bill, I was a little unnerved about
4 receiving the e-mail about the rate increase.

5 But I heard a break down from one of the
6 representatives here that was on earlier. And
7 I felt a little better about the periodical
8 increase over the years.

9 But at the end of the day, for some, it
10 will still come to an amount that would not be
11 manageable, especially for seniors -- and young
12 families, young couples with children.

13 With that being said, I wanted to thank
14 the Councilwoman, I'm a resident in her
15 district, for coming on and sharing the
16 statement representing this area of Hunting
17 Park, which is very diverse. We have a lot
18 going on over here.

19 They did the park with the preservation --
20 it was a water project that lasted about two
21 years in Hunting Park.

22 And there's been some complaints about
23 that, because it really wasn't -- I would
24 say -- finished properly. They dug out these

1 little pools all over this park and boarded it
2 with a green substance. And now it collects
3 the water, but it's unsafe for youth.

4 The park has a lot of sports activities
5 going on. We have baseball. We have football.
6 There's tennis. There's handball. There's
7 basketball courts. There's a rec center right
8 in the middle.

9 And with these water preservation -- I'm
10 not sure if I'm using the correct term for
11 it -- these areas that are not blocked off
12 properly can be easily a pool that someone, an
13 animal, even, can drowned in. So there's been
14 a number of complaints about that.

15 But overall, I thank you for allowing me
16 to speak. And I just wanted to get that out
17 there, that this forum has been very, very
18 helpful. Transparency is paramount these days
19 with so much that's been going on with
20 everyone.

21 Thank you, Judge Chestnut, and all the
22 other officials that are on this call.

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you,
24 Mrs. Day.

1 Does anybody have any questions?

2 Mr. Dasent did you want to follow up on what
3 she was saying about the --

4 MR. DASENT: Yes. I'd like to reach out
5 to Ms. Day if she'll give me her contact
6 information to follow up on the park and some
7 of her other comments to address her concerns.

8 And Ms. Day, if you can leave your name in
9 the chat, we can reach out to you that way.

10 MS. DAY: Okay. I will. Thank you so
11 very much.

12 I apologize for the video. I was having
13 some problems with the screen. It came up and
14 I looked all fuzzy so that's why you don't see
15 my face.

16 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you very
17 much for taking the time. We appreciate it.

18 And let me say, people have been referring
19 to me as Judge Chestnut. I think it's a hold
20 over from when I worked at the PUC and was an
21 Administrative Law Judge, but that's not a
22 lifetime appointment. You don't have to call
23 me that. You can call me Ms. Chestnut. That's
24 fine.

1 MS. DAY: Sounds good.

2 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I have to say,
3 I'm used to it, though, so I don't always catch
4 it when someone says it.

5 Steven, who is next on the list?

6 MR. LIANG: Catherine. She sent me a
7 private message.

8 MS. JENNINGS: Hi.

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Hold on. I
10 have to find you.

11 MS. JENNINGS: I'm just a black screen.

12 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Oh, there you
13 are.

14 I'll be honest, this is my first Zoom
15 public hearing --

16 MS. JENNINGS: You're fine.

17 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I'm an old
18 person and it's harder for me, but I'm trying.

19 Okay. Do you want to give us your name
20 and address for the record, please? Spell your
21 name.

22 MS. JENNINGS: Sure. Catherine,
23 C-A-T-H-E-R-I-N-E, Jennings, J-E-N-N-I-N-G-S.
24 1237 East Columbia, 19125.

1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And how did you
2 hear about this?

3 MS. JENNINGS: I heard it from e-mail and
4 local civic groups.

5 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Are you
6 appearing on behalf of a group?

7 MS. JENNINGS: Not formally, no. I'm
8 appearing on behalf of myself, but probably
9 many others -- the opinion of many others.

10 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

11 MS. JENNINGS: So anyway, what I'm not
12 hearing addressed at all here -- and maybe it
13 was addressed in prior meetings or future
14 meetings it will be, whatever -- but I'm not
15 hearing anything about landlords.

16 And so with this rate increase coming,
17 obviously, during this pandemic and everything
18 else, the water bill is something that follows
19 the owners of the property.

20 And so this highly affects small landlords
21 and small business owners, whereas electric
22 bills and gas bills follow tenants and nothing
23 follows squatters.

24 So I hear -- and I'm not sure if I have

1 the number correctly -- that right now we
2 have -- and I could have the wrong number --
3 75 percent -- as high as 75 percent of water
4 bills not being paid. And this falls then back
5 on the people who actually are paying their
6 water bills.

7 And for landlords -- are paying -- so if I
8 have tenants who -- the water bill is
9 incorporated into their lease and they decide
10 that they -- and I know many of these
11 situations -- when they decided last April, I'm
12 not paying anything now. I don't have to. And
13 I can use as much water as I want, et cetera,
14 et cetera, it's falling back on the landlords,
15 who are getting hit in an astronomical way
16 anyway.

17 So are any considerations at all taking
18 place for the landlords? And is now really the
19 time to do any type of rate increase, really,
20 for anything? That's all I have.

21 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Mr. Dasent, do
22 you briefly want to respond to the landlord
23 question?

24 MR. DASENT: Yes. We have an RCAS group

1 that deals with landlord issues among other
2 things, but they have a good number of
3 landlords and folks with small rental
4 properties.

5 And I think that would be a helpful way to
6 reach out to Catherine. And I'd like also to
7 get her name, because there may be other issues
8 that we can help her with and to explain the
9 rate increase and why we need it, because we
10 are in a financial deficit.

11 And I know that has to be balanced against
12 the needs of our customers, as well.

13 But we're happy to talk to her about that.

14 MS. JENNINGS: May I ask a question
15 regarding the statement you just made?

16 What is being done to go after the people
17 who aren't paying their water bill?

18 So if you have -- and I don't know,
19 exactly, what your numbers are, but I'm going
20 to take a wild guess that the percentage of
21 nonpayment is higher than the percentage of
22 people paying. So it falls back on one group.

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: That's a
24 legitimate question, Ms. Jennings, absolutely,

1 in terms of uncollectables and the impact, but
2 it's not something that can be addressed right
3 here and now tonight.

4 What I can suggest is Mr. Dasent can talk
5 about that with you, also, okay?

6 MR. DASENT: Yes. If you have time right
7 now, we can go into a chat -- Glen Abrams is
8 here.

9 If not, leave your name in the chat and
10 we'll reach out to you later.

11 MR. BALLENGER: Can I ask a question real
12 quick?

13 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Absolutely.

14 MR. BALLENGER: I'm just curious. Have
15 your tenants applied for programs like the TAP
16 program to help with their water bill?

17 MS. JENNINGS: Some have, some have not.
18 And I'm not speaking for myself, but it could
19 happen to me tomorrow. We have tenants who
20 have become squatters.

21 So even though I speak a little bit for
22 myself, we have an overall broader issue, I
23 think, as well, that -- I'm not just being seen
24 addressed anywhere.

1 MR. BALLENGER: The Water Department has
2 tried to do some things for duplicate billing.

3 Do you receive like duplicate bills for
4 your tenants' accounts?

5 MS. JENNINGS: No, I do not.

6 MR. BALLENGER: Okay.

7 MR. DASENT: Catherine, I'm not seeing
8 your contact information in the chat. I'm
9 hopeful you'll provide that, because we'd
10 really like to follow up.

11 MR. LIANG: Now that everyone is back, I
12 can assign her to a breakout room.

13 MS. JENNINGS: I can't do one right now,
14 but I left you my e-mail address. And we can
15 make an appointment to have a conversation.

16 MR. DASENT: That works. Thank you.

17 MR. BALLENGER: Thank you for your
18 contributions this evening. I have no
19 additional questions.

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you very
21 much for spending the time to talk to us.

22 MR. LIANG: Next up would be Antonia
23 Batts. She was on the phone initially.

24 MS. BATTS: Yes. Hello.

1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Wait, wait.

2 Hold on a second.

3 Do you want to give us and spell your
4 name?

5 MS. BATTS: Yes. A-N-T-O-N-I-A. The last
6 name is Batts B-A-T-T-S, like baseball bats.

7 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And your
8 address, please?

9 MS. BATTS: Yes. 1401 North 16th Street,
10 Philadelphia, PA 19121.

11 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. And are
12 you appearing on your own behalf or for a
13 group?

14 MS. BATTS: I'm actually appearing on
15 behalf, mostly, of the Workers Benefit Council.

16 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.
17 Ms. Batts, we've already heard from them
18 multiple times. It's not really fair to other
19 people.

20 MS. BATTS: Okay.

21 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Unless you want
22 to talk about your own experience as a
23 customer, but it's just not fair to everybody
24 else who hasn't had a chance yet.

1 MS. BATTIS: That's no problem.

2 I was hoping to just mention -- even
3 though I admit I am not a person at this time
4 who generates a water bill on my behalf that I
5 would pay -- being a veteran, I was hoping to
6 say, I was anticipating the possibly of maybe
7 buying a little humble home in the near future,
8 because I have a relative who is aging.

9 And if there were a need for me to
10 anticipate trying to buy a home, I would be
11 concerned about my budget that I can approve
12 from being able to afford something that, you
13 know, would be figured into the possibility to
14 live.

15 She would be, you know, pretty much low
16 income. And I'm on a fixed income, myself.
17 And not a pretty good one, but it's feasible.

18 And I was hoping to ask if, you know, you
19 all can let us know if there's any other
20 alternative means for the water bill people to
21 be able to work things out, you know, so we can
22 have a cost of living wage that can adjust to
23 whatever your financial requirements will be,
24 that you'll take all of that into

1 consideration.

2 Because many of us, we don't -- we try to
3 be there for our aging parents, but it's not
4 easy when you're trying to see if you can even
5 fit into a home to budget for, you know, just
6 the basics to be able to live by.

7 So thank you very much if you'd consider
8 that.

9 And I don't know if the VA will approve me
10 for a loan or however they do it, but I would
11 hope that you, you know, would take that into
12 consideration. And thank you very much.

13 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you,
14 Ms. Batts. I hope you're successful in getting
15 your house.

16 MS. BATTS: Thank you.

17 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Does anyone
18 have any questions for Ms. Batts?

19 MR. DASENT: Well, I hope the TAP program
20 will be a resource that she can draw on if
21 she's eligible.

22 And point out to her when she does have a
23 home and wants to sign up for an account, the
24 WRB can help her get into the appropriate

1 program.

2 And at present, with her senior parents or
3 members of the household, they might qualify
4 for the senior discount right now.

5 MS. BATTIS: Oh. Okay. Thank you.

6 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I urge you to
7 make use of anything you can. There are a lot
8 of programs out there. Hopefully they work for
9 you.

10 Okay. Any other questions for Ms. Batts?

11 (No response.)

12 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you very
13 much, Ms. Batts. We appreciate you taking the
14 time to talk to us.

15 MS. BATTIS: Thank you.

16 MR. LIANG: Next up would be Lauren
17 Fahnestock.

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: There you are.

19 MR. FAHNESTOCK: The spelling of the name
20 is L-A-U-R-E-N, F-A-H-N-E-S-T-O-C-K.

21 Address is 5135 Newhall Street,
22 Philadelphia 19144.

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Are you
24 appearing on your own behalf --

1 MR. FAHNESTOCK: I am.

2 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And how did you
3 hear about this?

4 MR. FAHNESTOCK: E-mail.

5 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

6 MR. FAHNESTOCK: I want to thank the Water
7 Department for -- and the Water Rate Board for
8 this opportunity to hear from customers. I
9 think it's really important that all voices are
10 heard.

11 I am a 25-year resident of Philadelphia
12 and, as noted in my address, current resident
13 of Germantown.

14 And I want to take the opportunity to
15 applaud the Water Department for providing an
16 essential service to our City, because without
17 clean water, the City wouldn't exist as it is
18 does today and certainly cannot continue to
19 function in a healthy way without clean water
20 that is essential to life.

21 I also want to praise the Department for
22 the efforts to make water affordable. I think
23 I heard a number of times that the TAP program
24 was referenced. And I know a number of folks

1 that have been, you know -- friends,
2 neighbors -- that have been on that program.
3 And I understand it's one of the best
4 assistance programs in the country by a water
5 utility. So I applaud the Water Department for
6 that.

7 And even the compassion the Water
8 Department has shown with the shutoff
9 moratorium, I think it's commendable -- just
10 the compassion shown to the City with those
11 measures.

12 And as a customer, I think the water rates
13 proposed are reasonable, you know, given the
14 essential nature of clean drinking water for
15 our City, you know, considering the need, the
16 amount I need to pay on monthly basis for other
17 utilities -- specifically, I'm thinking about
18 broadband, internet, wireless service. I pay
19 far more for those two than I do for clean
20 drinking water. And frankly, those are less
21 essential to my daily survival than clean
22 water.

23 So I do think, you know, what the Water
24 Department is requesting with this rate

1 increase is reasonable.

2 And so I just want to underscore, from my
3 perspective, the importance of sustaining our
4 drinking water infrastructure and for our City
5 to remain healthy and viable as a City. We
6 certainly see the need for investment in our
7 infrastructure across the board and not just
8 drinking water infrastructure but streets,
9 roads, et cetera.

10 And so I recognize that our City has to
11 find any and all means to make that happen.
12 So -- I want to just voice my support for the
13 Water Department.

14 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you for
15 taking the time.

16 Does anyone have any questions for
17 Mr. Fahnestock?

18 MR. DASENT: I'd just like to observe as a
19 guy from Germantown, Germantown rules. Thank
20 you.

21 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I don't know.
22 Since my family is from South Philly, I'm not
23 sure I really want that on the record.

24 (Laughter.)

1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Mr. Ballenger?

2 MR. BALLENGER: Well, I guess -- no, no
3 questions.

4 But I think, you know, it's important to
5 hear multiple perspectives, but I'm a little
6 bit concerned that perhaps you're speaking also
7 in your professional capacity here.

8 Is that -- do you work in the water
9 industry, sir?

10 MR. FAHNESTOCK: I do, yes.

11 MR. BALLENGER: Well, I appreciate your
12 input. Thank you.

13 MR. HAVER: I'll ask. In what capacity do
14 you work?

15 MR. DASENT: This is becoming
16 cross-examination.

17 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Yeah. Is it
18 relevant?

19 MR. HAVER: Of course it is. And it's a
20 normal question to ask people if they work for
21 the Water Department or the Water Revenue
22 Bureau or have family members that or are
23 contracted.

24 That's a normal part of asking people

1 before they testify. It certainly speaks to
2 their bias.

3 MR. FAHNESTOCK: I'm a Civil engineer by
4 training, and so I do believe in the value of
5 our infrastructure, so...

6 MR. BALLENGER: I think everyone here
7 would agree with that. Thank you, sir.

8 MR. FAHNESTOCK: Mm-hmm.

9 MR. LIANG: Next is -- I'm not sure their
10 name. Their screen name is G-R-N-S-L.

11 MS. GREEN: Hi. Can everyone see me?

12 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Yes. Do you
13 want to give us your name please?

14 MS. GREEN: Yes. My name is Evelyn Green.

15 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Could you spell
16 that for the record?

17 MS. GREEN: E-V-E-L-Y-N, G-R-E-E-N.

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And your
19 address, please?

20 MS. GREEN: 160 West Cheltenham Avenue,
21 Philadelphia, PA 19120.

22 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Are you
23 appearing on your own behalf or are you
24 speaking for a group?

1 MS. GREEN: I am appearing on my own
2 behalf.

3 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And how did you
4 hear about the hearing?

5 MS. GREEN: Through the newspapers. I was
6 just reading it through Metro.

7 And also, I have been communicating with
8 the Water Department regarding my bill.

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Go
10 ahead, Ms. Green.

11 MS. GREEN: Okay. The reason I wanted to
12 be part of this hearing is because I'm very,
13 very concerned about the Water Department
14 increasing the water rate among Philadelphia
15 residents.

16 I am concerned with this when we are in a
17 pandemic, when the job lists right here in
18 Philadelphia is even insurmountable. I even
19 was laid off my job during the pandemic, in
20 which has hurt me considerably.

21 Also, during this, I have been trying to
22 fight, in terms of my water bill, for over
23 three years -- I have tried to get assistance
24 from the Water Department. I applied for TAP.

1 I applied for the LIHEAP program.

2 But they stated that I was not eligible,
3 because I own a duplex. I live in the duplex.
4 And at the time, I did not have a renter. And
5 I was laid off and I almost lost my home.

6 I believe that the Water Department should
7 have a separate procedure and policy for those
8 who have a small dwelling like me and I live it
9 in.

10 If it was not for my family members, I
11 would have lost my home, because I did not
12 have -- once I was laid off, I did not have the
13 money to continuously, continuously pay,
14 because I was trying to do repairs for my
15 duplex.

16 And I think a rate -- an increased rate
17 would even hurt us considerably.

18 And I understand that the Water Department
19 and many, many companies are facing financial
20 crisis, but I want to make this stipulation, as
21 well, this comment, and I hope I don't offend
22 anyone -- that I believe -- and when I'm doing
23 the statistics and when I'm examining
24 statistics and looking at incident rates, in

1 the Philadelphia population, we have many, many
2 communities of color.

3 And it is going to impact African
4 Americans, Hispanics, dramatically. Many
5 people will speak and say and come on your
6 behalf in terms of your hearing and state that:
7 Oh, well, the Water Department should do an
8 increase. They have been hit. And you have
9 been impacted.

10 But I don't think anyone is looking at the
11 statistics in terms of the social determinants
12 that's impacting African Americans. And the
13 rate increase is going to impact us as a
14 group -- and minorities. It's going to impact
15 minorities. It's not going to impact
16 individuals that may have high salaries.

17 And it's always impacting minorities.
18 Rates not just for the Water Department -- our
19 insurance, it's always impacting minority
20 communities in the North Philadelphia area.

21 I live in Olney section. We always are
22 getting hit very, very hard. And we are facing
23 many social determinants -- in our city of
24 Philadelphia.

1 And I wish there was some way that the
2 Water Department could -- besides in this
3 pandemic -- to reach out and have a fundraiser,
4 have a telethon for the Water Department -- I'm
5 not sure.

6 But to put this on, I think is adding
7 insult to injury. It's already -- we're
8 dealing with -- our people are dealing with
9 mental health crisis. I am a crisis counselor.
10 I'm also a public health professional. And I
11 have hundreds and hundreds of people calling
12 me. They are stressed out with the pandemic,
13 with the bills. I have people that say: I'm
14 so depressed. I'm ready to give up.

15 With all of these bills -- so now, here
16 comes the Water Department adding another layer
17 when already we have the Coronavirus that we
18 have. Now we have more financial. All of
19 this, and no one is dealing with the social
20 determinants.

21 I would not dare -- I would not ask any
22 agency. I would hope that not any agency would
23 come for poor people in this Philadelphia area
24 and ask for increase in the moment that we're

1 having a pandemic and a financial crisis.

2 It is just -- when I heard about it in the
3 newspaper that you were going to increase the
4 rates, I said: I don't know what the Water
5 Department is looking at. I don't know with
6 all of the things and the social
7 determinants -- and when I'm talking about
8 social determinants, I'm talking about the
9 education system. I'm talking about income
10 levels. I'm talking about healthcare. I'm
11 talking about all of these things that we are
12 hounded with.

13 And at this moment -- was not a good time
14 to bring up the water -- increase in the water.

15 I'm getting phone calls, because people
16 know that I'm a public health professional.
17 They know that I'm a crisis counselor, so
18 they're calling me saying: Can you believe
19 this? Are you going to be speaking? What are
20 you going to do? Crying. People have lost
21 their loved ones through COVID and now they
22 said they have to deal with this, with the
23 Water Department.

24 And I want to thank the Water Department

1 for giving us that forbearance where we do not
2 have to try to pay everything at one time. I
3 know that y'all are facing crisis, as well.
4 But I ask you to please consider -- not during
5 this time, to increase the rate.

6 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you.
7 That was very compelling. And that's the
8 reason we have these public hearings, is to
9 hear how it impacts people -- to put a face to
10 the impact of the decisions.

11 I find it sometimes easy to forget that
12 real people are affected by these decisions and
13 by these utilities. It's hard for everybody.
14 It's been a very horrible year.

15 And I will tell you there are utilities in
16 the state that have just gone ahead like there
17 was no pandemic. And I'm always amazed at
18 that.

19 MS. GREEN: I'm amazed. Like I don't
20 understand it. I mean, how could -- you know,
21 and no one looks at people's emotional health.
22 People are going off.

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Mm-hmm.

24 MS. GREEN: And this -- when you talk

1 about a rate increase, I try to tell people:
2 Calm down. I understand with money, but we got
3 people who have lost their lives. Y'all know
4 we have over 500 deaths in the United States
5 because of Coronavirus. I've lost several
6 people, friends and family, due to this
7 Coronavirus. So they are dealing with that and
8 here it comes -- boom.

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you very
10 much for taking the time and expressing
11 yourself like that.

12 Does anybody have any questions or
13 comments?

14 MR. DASENT: Just one comment, Ms. Green,
15 just recognize last year, right before the
16 pandemic, we filed for rate relief. We
17 withdrew that rate cause, because of the
18 pandemic and we knew all the pain and the
19 problems that it would create with the shut
20 down of the economy.

21 Having done that and borrowed against our
22 reserves, we're now in a position where we have
23 to ask for some money to make sure we can
24 sustain vital utility services for everybody.

1 And we recognize it has to be a balance
2 between what you can afford and what we can,
3 sort of, do to get by. But that's what we're
4 trying to do, sort of thread that needle.

5 And it requires your input. And we thank
6 you for that.

7 MS. GREEN: Okay. You're welcome.

8 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Mr. Ballenger?

9 MR. BALLENGER: I just wanted to also
10 thank you for your testimony tonight and just
11 make sure that we reiterate that the final
12 decision is made by the Board. It's not made
13 by the Department.

14 And we're going to be taking some
15 different positions from the Department in this
16 case about what should happen next.

17 MS. GREEN: Can I just say something else?

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Sure.

19 MS. GREEN: In terms of over the years,
20 has the Water Department looked to ask
21 different corporations to help the Water
22 Department? I mean, what kind -- I want to
23 know what kind of fundraising or what -- I know
24 this is, you know, the city and the state and

1 all of that.

2 But what can -- is there some type of task
3 force to help the Water Department? Why can't
4 if you had a task have that help the Water
5 Department?

6 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you very
7 much, Ms. Green. Again, we appreciate this.
8 Thank you.

9 MR. BALLENGER: I think that's an
10 appropriate follow up for the Department.

11 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Absolutely.

12 MR. DASENT: Ms. Green, I don't know that
13 I have your contact information. I can get it
14 from Steven, but if you leave it in the chat,
15 I'll be double sure to reach out to you.

16 MR. LIANG: I don't have her contact
17 information. She hasn't sent it to me.

18 MR. DASENT: Okay. Ms. Green, if you can
19 leave your e-mail in the chat -- you're
20 frozen --

21 MS. GREEN: My phone number is (267)
22 324-1120.

23 MR. DASENT: Great. We will reach out to
24 you, because I would like to follow up and

1 respond to some of your concerns.

2 MS. GREEN: Okay. Thank you so much and
3 thank you for allowing me to speak.

4 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: We appreciate
5 it. You did us a favor.

6 Mr. Ballenger, did you have something you
7 wanted to say?

8 MR. BALLENGER: No thank you,
9 Ms. Chestnut.

10 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you.
11 Steven?

12 MR. LIANG: That's all the people I had on
13 my list.

14 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Is there
15 anybody who hasn't spoken who wants to?

16 MS. REED: Hi. I just wanted to, if it
17 was possible, to have a minute to speak? I
18 know it's getting pretty late.

19 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Sure. Are you
20 Amber?

21 MS. REED: Yes, I am Amber.

22 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Could you give
23 and spell your name for the record, please?

24 MS. REED: Yes. It's A-M-B-E-R. And my

1 last name, as well, correct?

2 MR. DASENT: Yes.

3 MS. REED: It's R-E-E-D, Reed.

4 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And your
5 address please?

6 MS. REED: Yes. 5534 Beaumont Avenue.

7 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Your ZIP?

8 MS. REED: 19143.

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Are you
10 appearing on your own behalf or for a group?

11 MS. REED: Yes, I am. I'm appearing on my
12 won behalf.

13 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And how did you
14 hear about this?

15 MS. REED: A family member informed me
16 about it.

17 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: So word of
18 mouth?

19 MS. REED: Yes, mm-hmm.

20 So I just wanted to jump in really
21 quickly. I am a tenant who does pay her water
22 bill in addition to all of the other utilities.

23 And I would just say, I understand
24 everybody is concerned about the increase, as

1 am I, for someone who has taken on a lot of
2 financial responsibility. And I understand the
3 other side of the aisle where, you know, we do
4 need to increase funds to take care of the
5 infrastructure.

6 However, I do have to echo the sentiments
7 from the other side, which is raising the rates
8 at this time in such a really difficult
9 financial time for a lot of people would be
10 very insensitive. But also, it would not be
11 mindful of the financial struggles that people
12 are going through.

13 And I don't know if it was covered, but
14 one of the things I was thinking about
15 listening to a lot of people speaking was if
16 there was a process in which the rates would be
17 increased so that it's not a burden that's
18 dropped on people all of a sudden -- like I
19 don't know if that was something that was
20 talked about or...

21 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Well, I was
22 going to say, it is a two-year increase.

23 MS. REED: Okay.

24 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Some on the

1 first year and then some on the second year.

2 MS. REED: And that would take into
3 consideration people transitioning back into
4 the work force.

5 I know that the country is slowly starting
6 to open up, but the financial instability is
7 still, for many people, the same.

8 That is all I have to say.

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Does
10 anyone have any questions for comment?
11 Mr. Dasent or Mr. Ballenger?

12 MR. DASENT: No. Just thank you,
13 Ms. Reed. I'm taking notes. Thank you.

14 MR. BALLENGER: Likewise, Ms. Reed. Thank
15 you for your testimony.

16 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you for
17 taking the time. Appreciate it.

18 Anybody else who hasn't already spoken?

19 (No response.)

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I don't see
21 anybody raising their hands --

22 MR. LIANG: Barbara Panzano raised her
23 hand again.

24 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: You've already

1 spoken, Ms. Panzano. If you want to take -- I
2 don't want to get into a continuous loop here,
3 but if you want to make a real brief statement.

4 MS. PANZANO: Very brief statement.

5 One thing that I didn't hear addressed
6 through the whole meeting was looking for
7 efficiencies.

8 As I've explained, this is the highest
9 bill I pay out of all the utilities -- maybe
10 whatever PGW is doing and PECO is doing would
11 be a help to the Water Department.

12 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Ms. Panzano,
13 we've got that. Right.

14 And I can assure you that definitely the
15 Public Advocate is looking for efficiencies in
16 every aspect of the Company's operations.
17 That is, actually, one of the main purposes
18 here -- to make sure they are as efficient as
19 possible and really do need a rate increase if
20 one is ordered.

21 I think the last time the Company had a
22 rate case with the Rate Board -- I forget how
23 much the Department asked for, but I think they
24 only got a very small increase, which was a

1 small percentage of what they filed for. No?

2 Mr. Ballenger?

3 MR. BALLENGER: There's some debate about
4 that.

5 MR. DASENT: 1.4 percent.

6 MR. BALLENGER: Yeah, plus 15 million.

7 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. I wasn't
8 involved in that, so I don't want to say it.

9 But I just wanted to point out that the
10 Company doesn't always get what it asks for.
11 In fact, I'd say it very rare that they really
12 do.

13 But yes, efficiencies and external sources
14 of funds are, I would say, on everybody's find.

15 Okay. I think we should wrap it up here
16 then.

17 Does anybody want to -- Mr. Dasent?

18 Mr. Ballenger?

19 MR. DASENT: No benediction tonight.

20 We're just grateful for everyone coming out.

21 MR. BALLENGER: Likewise. Thank you very
22 much, Ms. Chestnut, and to every who came out
23 this evening. It's been our best attendance
24 yet.

1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I think it was.

2 I do want to remind everybody that you
3 still can send comments to the Rate Board.
4 Certainly, like I said, I'll read them.
5 They'll be posted.

6 And if you're interested in following the
7 progress of the case, go to the Rate Board's
8 website. Documents are posted there and
9 information is provided there.

10 And it's really -- maybe I'm biased, but I
11 think it's pretty easy to navigate and pretty
12 clear.

13 So that should help you keep in touch in
14 terms of what's going on, because we do try to
15 keep everyone notified, okay?

16 MR. BALLENGER: Someone else is trying to
17 get in.

18 MR. FOSTER: Real quickly. Sorry.

19 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Well -- okay.
20 Are you a customer?

21 MR. FOSTER: Yes.

22 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Do you want to
23 give your name and spell it for the record?

24 MR. FOSTER: Yes. It's Thomas Foster,

1 T-H-O-M-A-S, F-O-S-T-E-R.

2 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And your
3 address?

4 MR. FOSTER: 2200 Benjamin Franklin
5 Parkway, Unit 1512, Philadelphia, PA 19130.

6 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Are you
7 appearing on your own behalf?

8 MR. FOSTER: Yes.

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Go
10 ahead, sir.

11 MR. FOSTER: I just wanted to say that I
12 appreciate how the shut off freezes through
13 April 2022 now.

14 And I also appreciate how PGW is working
15 on the watershed program to keep the streams
16 and everything else clean, because the
17 rivers -- all the trash and everything flows to
18 the rivers, so just keep up the good work with
19 that.

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Is that it?

21 MR. FOSTER: That's it.

22 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: That was brief.
23 Thank you.

24 Does anyone have any questions or comments

1 about that?

2 MR. DASENT: Nope. Thank you.

3 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you very
4 much, sir.

5 MR. FOSTER: You're welcome. Have a good
6 night.

7 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you. You
8 too.

9 Thank you all. I appreciate the time and
10 the effort that everybody took. Good night.

11

12 - - - - -

13 (Whereupon the hearing concluded at 7:58 p.m.)

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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, hereby certify that the proceedings and evidence noted are contained fully and accurately in the stenographic notes taken by me in the foregoing matter, and that this is a correct transcript of the same.

Kathryn Doyle
Court Reporter - Notary Public

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