

PHILA WATER HEARING BOARD
3/22/2023 6:00 p.m.

PHILADELPHIA WATER, SEWER, AND STORM WATER
RATE BOARD
PUBLIC HEARING

Wednesday, March 22, 2023
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

TIME: 6:00 p.m.

LOCATION: Zoom Teleconference

HELD BEFORE: HONORABLE MARLANE R. CHESTNUT,
Hearing Officer

LEXITAS LEGAL - PHILADELPHIA
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1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Good evening, everybody.

2 Thank you for attending.

3 Let me introduce myself. I am Marlane Chestnut. I'm
4 the Hearing Officer assigned to oversee this case. This is one
5 of the public -- public hearings that has been scheduled by the
6 Philadelphia Water Department -- I'm sorry -- the Philadelphia
7 Water, Sewer, and Stormwater Rate Board, the Rate Board to give
8 the Board a chance to hear directly from you concerning the Water
9 Department's proposed rates and charges for fiscal year 2024 and
10 2025.

11 The Rate Board is an independent body established to
12 set rates and charges for water and sewer service. As part of
13 its mandate to conduct an open and transparent examination of the
14 proposed rates, the Board has hired Community Legal Services to
15 act as the Public Advocate in this case and has selected me as
16 the hearing officer to ensure that this hearing is conducted in a
17 fair, impartial, and expeditious manner.

18 There's a court reporter who will produce a
19 stenographic record of this proceeding, so please be sure to
20 speak slowly and clearly. All transcripts and documents produced
21 in this process are posted on the Rate Board's website under the
22 rate proceedings tab under the selection 2023 General Rate
23 Proceeding. Before we get to hearing from you, I will introduce
24 representatives from the Water Department and the Public Advocate

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1 so that they can tell you their role and what they're doing in
2 this case.

3 Mr. Dasent or someone from the Water Department? Mr.
4 Dasent?

5 MR. DASENT: Thank you. Good evening, Your Honor.
6 Speaking for us is Deputy Commissioner for Communications and
7 Engagement will be speaking, Glen Abrams, and giving an opening
8 statement. Thank you.

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Mr. Abrams?

10 MR. ABRAMS: Thank you, Your Honor. Good evening,
11 everyone. My name is Glen Abrams, and I'm Deputy Commissioner of
12 Communications and Engagement at the Philadelphia Water
13 Department. And today I'm speaking on behalf of the Department
14 in this proceeding.

15 We first want to thank all of you for joining the
16 hearing to share your views about the rate increase request that
17 the Water Department has filed with the Philadelphia Water,
18 Sewer, and Stormwater Board. The Water Department provides
19 water, sanitary, sewer, and stormwater services to residential,
20 commercial, and industrial institutional customers within the
21 city.

22 These services are essential and the foundation of
23 public health in Philadelphia. We have recently requested an
24 adjustment in rates and charges so that we will have sufficient

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1 resources to continue current and planned programs and to pay
2 significantly increasing operating costs in fiscal years 2024 and
3 2025. Additional revenues are needed to ensure that clean water
4 is delivered as safely and reliably as possible and that
5 wastewater treatment and stormwater management services meet your
6 needs.

7 If the Rate Board approves the Water Department's
8 full request, a typical residential customer using 450 cubic
9 feet, or 3,366 gallons of water per month would see their bill
10 increase by about 11.8 percent in fiscal year 2024 and 8.3
11 percent in fiscal year 2025, or approximately \$8.16 per month
12 beginning on September 1, 2023, and an additional \$6.45 beginning
13 on September 1, 2024.

14 As explained in the Department's testimony, rate
15 relief is necessary now to sustain our operations. The
16 Department needs additional revenues to pay significant increases
17 in operating costs and expenses. Costs for labor, chemicals,
18 materials, and supplies are rising, along with increased costs
19 for regulatory compliance combined with capital program needs.
20 PWD also continues to invest in much needed upgrades to critical
21 water and wastewater infrastructure.

22 All projects planned for fiscal years 2024 and 2025
23 are critical investments to ensure that the utility can support
24 its operations and continue to provide safe and reliable service

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1 to current and future customers with a well-maintained water and
2 wastewater system you can count on.

3 One of the ways PWD is working to save customers
4 money and reduce costs is by applying for low-interest loans from
5 state and federal sources to lessen the burden of capital program
6 costs. We are also pursuing grant opportunities where feasible.
7 PWD has been successful in its application for federal support
8 for water system upgrades as announced by President Biden on
9 February 3rd, 2023.

10 PWD also worked with the Department of Revenue and
11 other city partners to help our customers achieve nearly
12 \$14,000,000 in debt relief from water bills since January 2022,
13 by working to connect people with a Temporary Low-Income
14 Household Water Assistance Program created by the federal
15 government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are
16 currently campaigning in Harrisburg and Washington, DC to make a
17 program like this available in the future.

18 Finally, we want you to know that Philadelphia has
19 robust and comprehensive customer assistance programs which help
20 low-income customers pay their bills. These programs include the
21 Tiered Assistance Program, or TAP, the senior citizen discount,
22 and other programs that are more flexible than ever. If you are
23 experiencing hardship, we want to help. You can use one
24 application for TAP, the senior citizen discount, or other

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1 programs available to assist households.

2 These programs are available through our website at
3 www.phila.gov/waterbillhelp or by calling (215) 685-6300, Monday
4 through Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

5 I would also note that if you have specific billing
6 questions or other service issues that you would like assistance
7 with, please let us know, and we will have a customer service
8 representative contact you as soon as possible.

9 Tonight we have Saterria Kersey from the public --
10 PWD, Public Affairs Division and O.J. Spivey from the Revenue
11 Bureau. Please use the chat function to identify yourself and
12 let us know if you'd like to speak in a breakout room to exchange
13 contact information and receive some other information.

14 Now, the purpose of today's session is to hear from
15 you, our customers. We appreciate you taking the time to share
16 your views with us today, and we look forward to hearing from
17 you. Thank you.

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you, Mr. Abrams.

19 Mr. Ballenger?

20 MR. BALLENGER: Thank you. Good evening. Thank you
21 all for coming. My name is Robert Ballenger. I'm an attorney at
22 Community Legal Services, and we serve as Public Advocate in this
23 case. I want to explain what that means and encourage you to
24 reach out to us if you have any questions.

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1 In general, in rate cases heard by the state Public
2 Utility Commission, agencies such as the Office of Consumer
3 Advocate and Office of Small Business Advocate participate to
4 represent the interests of residential or small business
5 customers. These agencies are funded by the annual assessments
6 that all of the utilities pay. This allows the agencies to do
7 things like hire witnesses to help thoroughly investigate the
8 utility's request for higher rates.

9 The Philadelphia Water Department is not regulated by
10 the Public Utility Commission, so those agencies do not
11 participate in our rate cases. Instead, the City has created an
12 analogous position, that is the Public Advocate. The Public
13 Advocate's job is to represent the interests of residential and
14 small business customers as a group by investigating the Water
15 Department's proposed rate increase, challenging the assumptions
16 that underlie it, and participating fully in all of the
17 proceedings before the Water Rate Board.

18 CLS serves as Public Advocate pursuant to a contract
19 which requires us to independently and forcefully represent the
20 interests of approximately a half million customers. That is
21 what we have done, and that is what we will do. The CLS
22 attorneys will work with our expert witnesses, and we will submit
23 written testimony and participate in technical hearings and
24 briefing to inform the Board of what we think it should do. We

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1 welcome your input today because the information you provide to
2 us can help us inform our experts and the positions that we take.

3 What have your experiences with the water bill been
4 like lately? How would a massive increase in the bill affect you
5 and your family? Do you have concerns about customer service or
6 other operations of the Water Department that we should know
7 about? If you have any questions or would like any assistance
8 following up regarding the Water Department's rate increase,
9 please call us at (215) 227-998 (sic) or email us at
10 publicadvocate@clsphila.org. I'll ask Steven -- I'll email or
11 text Steven the information to add to the chat so it's available
12 throughout the hearing.

13 But this is not your only opportunity to be heard.
14 After the hearings today, you can submit any additional
15 information to the Board you think it should have before it makes
16 a final decision, and we would be happy to help with that. Thank
17 you, and please know that your voices here today will be heard by
18 all involved.

19 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you, Mr. Ballenger.

20 I'd like to note that also participating in the
21 proceeding are the Philadelphia Water Revenue Board, which does
22 the actual billing and collection for the Water Department, PECO,
23 a group of large users known collectively as the Philadelphia
24 Large Users Group, and two individuals, Michael Skiendzielewski

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1 and Lance Haver, who are appearing on their own behalf.

2 Mr. Haver, did you want to make a statement, or would
3 you rather wait and testify?

4 MR. HAVER: No. I'd like to make an opening
5 statement. My name is Lance Haver. I'm not a lawyer, but like
6 many water consumers, I'm fed up with the constant rate
7 increases. I'm also angry that the Water Department, instead of
8 doing what 14 members of City Council urged them to do, which is
9 withdraw the rate request and seek federal, state, and city
10 funding, the Water Department has decided to go ahead and try and
11 reach into our pockets and take another 20 percent.

12 I've been a participant in this and in previous rate
13 cases. I urge every one of you to tell your stories and demand
14 the Water Department do everything it can to innovate, cut costs,
15 and find other sources of funds. But I want to caution you,
16 don't be confused by what is happening. The Water Department
17 doesn't expect to get everything it's asked for. It's a game it
18 plays that allows the Public Advocate, the Hearing Examiner, and
19 the Rate Board to claim they have done something to help us by
20 cutting some of the rate increase.

21 While the Water Department may not look out for us,
22 it's not run by stupid people. They know politically they can't
23 get everything they ask for, and that's why they ask for more
24 than what they need. I also want to draw your attention to the

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1 body that makes the decision, the Philadelphia Water Rate Board.
2 It has five members. Two are real estate developers. Two ran
3 utilities. One is the former water commissioner who hired many
4 of the people who put together this rate request. And are now --
5 she's now going to be sitting in judgment over whether the people
6 she hired are doing a good job or not.

7 The other is the former chief legal counsel from
8 Philadelphia Gas Works, a woman who has never opposed a rate
9 increase. I'll say it again, four of the five members represent
10 the business community. Two represent utilities, the former
11 water commissioner, and the former chief legal counsel for
12 Philadelphia Gas Works. There's only one consumer representative
13 on the Board. The Business and Utility Control Board, those four
14 or five members hire Ms. Chestnut, the Hearing Examiner, and they
15 hire the Public Advocate.

16 Now, the Public Advocate always sounds great, but
17 don't be confused as to what role the Public Advocate plays. The
18 dominated Rate Board itself wrote, the public is not the client
19 of the Public Advocate. The Public Advocate was hired by the
20 four out of five business representatives on the Rate Board and
21 only answers to the Rate Board. The ratepayers have no control
22 over the position the Public Advocate takes. And in the previous
23 rate case, the Public Advocate agreed to give the Water
24 Department not one, but two consecutive rate increases and then

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1 was given not one, but two contract extensions.

2 And understand, the business dominated Rate Board
3 hires the Hearing Examiner, who has directed thus -- those of us
4 opposing the rate increase, to use a spreadsheet to make our
5 argument. Nowhere on the spreadsheet are there lines for cost
6 savings through combining services with PGW or Innovation. And
7 no line on the spreadsheet considers how much the Water
8 Department collects of what it bills. And no line on the
9 spreadsheet considers how easy or hard it is for people to pay a
10 20 percent increase.

11 The only way for us to force the Water Department to
12 cut costs and seek funding from the COVID dollars available is to
13 demand it. We cannot stop the Public Advocate from settling this
14 case as it did in the last case. We have no control. There's no
15 client group. There's no public that it represents. We cannot
16 force the Hearing Examiner to change the spreadsheet to include
17 all issues, not just the issues the Water Department wants
18 considered.

19 If we are to be successful at forcing the Water
20 Department to cut rates, innovate, and to find other sources, we
21 have to demand it and ask our elected officials, as I will
22 tomorrow in city council, to join us in doing so.

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Are you finished?

24 MR. HAVER: Yes.

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1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you. Let me give
2 you an overview of the process and tell you where we are in terms
3 of schedule.

4 I need to back up. There were some misstatements
5 that Mr. Haver made that I would urge you to go directly to the
6 Rate Board's website and look for yourself. He made some
7 inaccurate statements and not quite sure why, but I urge you to
8 make your own decision. But with respect to the spreadsheet,
9 that's an easy one.

10 It is not as Mr. Haver would have you believe it's
11 intended to prevent people from recommending adjustments or
12 suggestions. It's simply a way of calculating the revenue impact
13 of whatever proposals are made. Any participant can file
14 whatever testimony with whatever suggestions they want to make,
15 and that's fine. That's fine. The spreadsheet has nothing to do
16 with that. The spreadsheet just quantifies the amount of -- of
17 these adjustments.

18 Well it is true, but, you know, Mr. Haver, not sure
19 why you feel it necessary to make this statement, but, okay,
20 we'll move on.

21 Let me give you an overview of the process and tell
22 you where we are with respect to the schedule. The Rate Board's
23 regulations provide that the Rate Board's review of the
24 department's filing needs to be completed within 120 days from

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1 the date of the formal notice, which is the filing that contains
2 the proposed rates and charges.

3 Now, that filing contains a substantial amount of
4 supporting statements, exhibits, documents. The other parties
5 have had an opportunity for them and their experts to review that
6 material in detail and to ask for further information to support
7 the Water Department's claims. If you go to the Rate Board's
8 website and if you look under the tab that's marked discovery,
9 that will show you the information request and the responses that
10 have been made in this case.

11 Everything is posted on the Rate Board's website.
12 After this opportunity for review, the Public Advocate and any
13 other non-Water Department participant will file its own
14 testimony and exhibits containing their opinion about the
15 proposed rates and what the Rate Board should do with respect to
16 the company's filing. Then everybody has a chance to respond to
17 everybody else's testimony.

18 What are called technical hearings on that written
19 testimony will be held sometime between May 2nd and the 5th.
20 Each side will present its witnesses and experts for cross-
21 examination and on-the-record proceedings. The actual dates will
22 be posted on the Rate Board's website, and they'll be conducted
23 virtually. You are welcome to observe.

24 After that, each participant has the opportunity to

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1 file a written statement of its position called a brief. I
2 expect that my report will be issued sometime around the end of
3 May, and the Rate Board will make its decision probably around
4 mid-June.

5 Now, with respect to this hearing, first, thank you
6 very much for taking the time to attend this. It's so important
7 for the Rate Board to hear directly from people, you, who will be
8 affected by any change in rates. Sometimes in the rate making
9 process we talk about the ratepayers and customers as a group.
10 This adjustment will affect these customer groups in this way, or
11 the customers will -- this. But we generally sometimes forget
12 that the class we're talking about is made up of real, actual
13 people. That's why it's so important to put a face to you,
14 customers, and remember that these decisions impact people in
15 their daily life on a very vital service.

16 The reason why the Rate Board's regulations provide
17 that these public hearings be held early in the process is so
18 that the participants can consider the testimony that you give
19 here tonight and reflect it in the positions they take.

20 In terms of how I will conduct this hearing, I will
21 call on people who have registered. If you have not registered
22 and want to comment, that's fine. We'll get to you if there's
23 time, or you can register for one of the other public hearings.
24 Everybody will have a chance to make a statement if they wish, or

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1 you can send a letter or an email to the Rate Board.

2 We've received well over 30 emails so far. We post
3 everything, all these emails and letters, and I can assure you
4 that I have read or will read every single one of them.

5 When it's your turn, I'll call your name. Steven
6 will unmute you, unmute your microphone or your telephone. I
7 will ask your name. And rather than ask your address, I will
8 simply ask if you're a customer of the Water Department, and I'll
9 ask if you're appearing on behalf of an organization or a group.
10 Please confine your remarks to the issue in this proceeding,
11 which are the proposed rates.

12 If you have an individual billing problem or a
13 service concern or you're seeking help in terms of paying your
14 bill, that's fine. We can direct you to the company, and they
15 will get your information and work directly with you. But we
16 don't want you to have to put your public information out, you
17 know, your private information out in the public record.

18 But really the purpose of this is to address the
19 proposed rates. So if you have a question about the rate
20 proceeding or the filing, if we can answer it briefly, we will.
21 But if it's not possible to answer it at this hearing, then
22 certainly I would expect Mr. Dasent or Mr. Ballenger will get
23 back to you with an answer to your question if you want.

24 Now, if you have not registered and wish to make a

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1 statement, raise your hand, and we'll get to you. Now, I'm not
2 sure if everybody knows how to raise their hand, but if you look
3 on your controls -- on mine, it says react. If I look, it has
4 reaction. And if you click on reaction, there are things like
5 thumbs up and thumbs down. That's how you can do it.

6 I'm not going to recognize anybody while I'm talking,
7 so I'm not sure why you're raising your hand now. If you have a
8 -- if you're here on a telephone -- if you're participating
9 telephonically, you can raise a hand by hitting the star button,
10 then the number nine.

11 After your statement, I'll ask participants if they
12 have any questions for you. This is not cross-examination, but
13 clarification, specifically, and oftentimes if the company can
14 get further information and direct you to sources of assistance.

15 This is not a legal proceeding. The Commission is
16 not like the PUC, which does have quasi-legal proceedings.
17 That's why we don't have parties. We have participants.
18 Testimony is not sworn. You don't need a lawyer. You don't need
19 to be a lawyer. There is not going to be any cross-examination
20 here, so please don't worry about that.

21 After you're done, you're welcome to stay, but you
22 certainly don't have to. You're free to leave at any time. And
23 before we hear from you, I do need -- I want to make an
24 additional statement. While the primary reason is to hear from

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1 you about how the impact of this -- the impact of these proposed
2 rates will affect you and suggestions you have for the company, I
3 also want to use this opportunity so that you can see how the
4 case is being conducted and feel comfortable with it. I want you
5 to feel comfortable and confident in the process.

6 Now, the reason I was selected as the Hearing
7 Examiner is because I have substantial experience. I was an
8 administrative law judge with the Public Utility Commission for
9 more than 25 years. I've done thousands of cases, rate cases.
10 I've done applications, petitions, special proceedings. I've
11 done PGW cases. I've done PECO cases. I've done cases all around
12 the state. So I know I've done water cases. I've done all kinds
13 of things.

14 But I also, and I probably the majority of my time
15 was dealing with individual customer complaint cases, both
16 ability-to-pay cases and service and billing issues. I'm very
17 familiar with the billing pressures that people face. In fact,
18 after I retired, the PUC did ask me to stay on for a year and
19 address an ability-to-pay complaint backlog, which I did. So I'm
20 very familiar with the whole rate making process, generally, the
21 rate examination of proposed rates, and also the impact on people
22 directly.

23 And in connection with that, I do want to ask you to
24 maybe think about this a different way. It's not the customers

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1 versus the Water Department. Your interests are not far apart.
2 Of course, customers don't want to pay excessive rates for the
3 service they receive, and the Water Department doesn't want you
4 to pay rates you can't afford. But you want to be sure that the
5 company -- that the Water Department has enough money to provide
6 you with reasonable and safe service.

7 So the way that I do see this, and I think I
8 analogize this to a bridge where both parties are coming from
9 their respective banks, but they're meeting in the middle. And
10 of course, there's some argument about where that spot should be,
11 but believe me, nobody at the Water Department wants to see you
12 not able to pay your bill. It's heartbreaking to deal with
13 people who are trying to pay their bill and can't. Water is an
14 essential service, and nobody wants to see anybody without it.

15 But then again, we have seen in this country a number
16 of areas where people have, for whatever reason, the water
17 service is not adequate, where the systems haven't been
18 maintained or whatever. So we want to be sure we hit that spot
19 where the water company has enough money to adequately operate
20 the system, but not more, and that people who need assistance in
21 paying their bills will be able to get it without a lot of
22 difficulty.

23 So that's where I'm coming from. And I think at this
24 point, we will open this up to people who have registered and

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1 then everybody else. Okay? The first person that I have on the
2 list that I was given is Desia Cruz (phonetic). Are you here?

3 Steven, do you see Desia Cruz? I do not. Is Desia
4 here on a different name?

5 MR. LIANG: No.

6 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: No? Okay. Well, we'll
7 get back to that then. How about Dana Scott (phonetic)? Is Dana
8 Scott here? And I can't always go by what the tile says because
9 you may be using somebody else's iPad or device. So that's why
10 I'm saying, is Dana Scott here? Okay. How about Patrick Fizz?

11 Patrick, are you here? If you are, could you raise a
12 hand? And you do that by going down to the reaction button and
13 picking the hands up.

14 MR. LIANG: We have Patrick.

15 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I think Patrick's here.
16 Okay, Steven, can you...

17 MR. FIZZ: Yes, I'm here.

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Mr. Fizz?

19 MR. FIZZ: Yes.

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Hold on just a
21 second here. Could you please -- you can put your hand down.

22 MR. FIZZ: Okay. One second. I'm new to the, the
23 Zoom meeting, so...

24 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Sure.

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1 MR. FIZZ: Okay. I think it's down.

2 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Yes, it is. Now, could
3 you give and spell your name for the record, please?

4 MR. FIZZ: Yes. My first name Patrick. Last name
5 Fizz, F-I-Z-Z.

6 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And are you a customer of
7 the Water Department?

8 MR. FIZZ: Yes, I am.

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Are you appearing on
10 behalf of any organization, or group, or as an individual?

11 MR. FIZZ: No. Just as an individual.

12 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. That's fine. Why
13 don't you go ahead then, please?

14 MR. FIZZ: Well, I'm most likely just here to hear
15 what everyone has to say. And to -- I suppose I advocate not
16 raising the rates mostly because as a homeowner, a new homeowner,
17 I'm living, like, paycheck to paycheck. And I've reached out to
18 different -- whether it's services or organizations about maybe
19 getting assistance with having my rates lowered or stabilized so
20 that it's not so difficult to pay them.

21 I'm told that I earn too much and because I don't
22 have, like significant amount of debt that there's really nothing
23 that can be done. But again, I more or less personally propose
24 that the rates do not increase, just as I said. It could be --

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1 it would make my situation a little more difficult. Hopefully
2 other people may not necessarily be in the same boat, but I hope
3 I don't speak alone with saying that I prefer that the rates do
4 not go up.

5 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Thank you. Does
6 that conclude your statement?

7 MR. FIZZ: I suppose it does, yeah. I don't want to
8 get too redundant, so, yes.

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: No. That's fine.
10 Does anybody have any clarifying questions or
11 comments they want to make to Mr. -- Mr. Fizz?

12 Mr. Dasent?

13 MR. DASENT: No questions. But if Mr. Fizz wants to
14 reach out to Water Revenue Bureau folks that are in the room,
15 they can -- he can have a private conversation in a breakout
16 session, and we'd be happy to accommodate him.

17 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Is that okay with you, Mr.
18 Fizz?

19 MR. FIZZ: Yes. I appreciate that.

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Talk to directly to them
21 and see if they can help you?

22 Okay. Steven, can you do that?

23 MR. FIZZ: I'd like to -- I'd like to continue, if
24 that's possible, with the -- you know -- the rest of the meeting.

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1 I don't necessarily want to break off and have a dialogue with
2 anyone individually if that's okay. Maybe wait till the end?

3 MR. DASENT: We will put our information in the chat,
4 Judge, if that's okay?

5 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Yeah. I'm not sure --
6 I'll be honest -- I'm not sure how these breakout rooms work if
7 you can come back into this main discussion.

8 Steven, do you know anything about that?

9 MR. LIANG: Yeah. He would be able to rejoin the
10 discussion after he finished talking with the Water Department
11 representatives.

12 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

13 MR. LIANG: But if, Mr. Fizz, you wanted to stay in
14 the meeting that's fine, too.

15 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: It's up to you.

16 MR. FIZZ: Yes. I'd like to stay in the meeting, if
17 that's possible.

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Sure. Absolutely. Okay.
19 The next person I have is Lira Israelova (phonetic). Somebody
20 says iPhone. That's not you, Lira, is it, I'm assuming? If that
21 is you, lower your hand. How's that? No? Okay.

22 There were some people who didn't specify what
23 session they wanted to make a statement at, so I'll go through
24 them, too. Aaron Horton (phonetic). All right. Kathy Bennet

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1 (phonetic). Jeannie Dennis (phonetic). Ninian Hibbert

2 (phonetic).

3 Okay. I see -- Mr. Haver, did you want to say
4 something?

5 MR. HAVER: I did. I have the right, just like the
6 Water Department, to question witnesses. And I would like to
7 first thank the gentleman who testified just before for his
8 testimony and explain how important what he said was that he
9 makes too much to qualify for any of the programs, but he doesn't
10 make enough to make ends meet. And that is critically important
11 information that I at least will use in fighting against this
12 rate increase.

13 I'm not sure that the Public Advocate will, but I
14 know that I will. So thank you sir, for testifying, for being
15 brave enough to share your story with us. And I'm also hoping
16 you'll call your councilperson and tell him or her to stop the
17 rate increase by contacting the Water Department directly.

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you.

19 MR. BALLENGER: If I may, Judge?

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Sure.

21 MR. BALLENGER: I didn't have the permission to
22 unmute, so I didn't say anything, and I thought we were moving on
23 to the next person.

24 I wanted to also just thank Mr. Fizz for his

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1 testimony here -- and also direct him to look into what's called
2 the Homeowner's Assistance Fund. There may be -- that's a state
3 fund program -- I believe I heard you say you were a homeowner,
4 Mr. Fizz. That may have some resources for you. It's currently
5 restructuring somewhat, but it is run statewide and provides
6 assistance with mortgage, real estate tax, utilities, things of
7 that nature, and can provide financial benefits. You may be
8 eligible for those.

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Mr. Fizz, did you get all
10 that? I think you have to unmute him, Steven. I'm sorry.

11 MR. FIZZ: Yes, I did hear that. Thank you.

12 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. So it sounds like
13 you could reach out to both the Water Department and to the
14 Public Advocate to see if there's some program or assistance that
15 you can get.

16 MR. FIZZ: Yes. I recently reached out to, like,
17 housing counseling, but then somewhat similar situation, I was --
18 I was told that because I'm not in severe debt and facing
19 foreclosure, that I wouldn't either qualify or be eligible. But
20 I -- I did try to do some research and reach out to see if I
21 could get some assistance. But I'll -- I'll continue doing that.
22 But so far, I haven't had any success.

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Well, maybe -- maybe there
24 is some help if you talk directly to the Water Department or

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1 to -- or to Mr. Ballenger's office. Maybe they can help you do a
2 better job of navigating through it or accessing something else.
3 But really, do you have anything to lose by talking to them?

4 MR. FIZZ: No, definitely not.

5 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Yeah. Okay. Thank you.
6 We very much appreciate you showing up and giving us your
7 thoughts.

8 Steven, who's next?

9 MR. LIANG: That would be iPhone.

10 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

11 MS. WRIGHT: My -- do I give my name first?

12 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Yes, please. Could you
13 give and spell your name?

14 MS. WRIGHT: Alice Wright, W-R-I-G-H-T.

15 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And are you a customer of
16 the Water Department, Ms. Wright?

17 MS. WRIGHT: Yes, I am.

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And are you appearing on
19 behalf of a group or an organization or for yourself?

20 MS. WRIGHT: I'm appearing for myself, and I'm
21 appearing for other people, especially seniors who are
22 struggling. I don't qualify for rate reduction, I'm 79, I have a
23 pension, I have a Social Security, and I have two jobs, and it's
24 still not enough. I'm food insecure.

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1 I don't think that the industrial pollution -- the
2 industries are taking full responsibility for the trash, the
3 PFAS, and all of the other contaminants that are in the water.

4 We can take trillions of dollars and go across the
5 world to kill people, but we can't -- we cannot take care of our
6 own people to make sure that they have water and food? It's not
7 fair. It is just -- it's just -- it's just not fair. We're not
8 one another's enemy. I'm not the Water Department's enemy. I
9 need the Water Department.

10 I mean, I literally have to move out of my house and
11 find someplace to live because I cannot afford to live in my
12 house that I've been here since 1979. What am I supposed to do?
13 Where am I supposed to go? I call -- and I have to give the
14 Water Department credit because they sent somebody all week long
15 along my block to find out what our situation was and to, I
16 guess, try to help. But call Council? Calling Council is like
17 calling nobody because no one responds. What are we supposed to
18 do?

19 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I really sympathize with
20 you, Ms. Wright. I do. But you know, when you say about getting
21 their attention, that's why you're here. You have
22 representatives from the Water Department here. You have CLS
23 here. And maybe if you talk, they can talk directly to you and
24 can help not just you, but your neighbors as well. Maybe there

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1 is some way of dealing with this that isn't frustrating, that is
2 able to get help to people who need it.

3 But I'm not real sure what to tell you because it
4 does sound like you've done a lot. But maybe there's more that
5 can be done to help you and your neighbors. And I would suggest
6 that maybe if CLS reaches out to you or the Water Department
7 reaches out to you, would you be willing to do that?

8 MS. WRIGHT: Absolutely.

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

10 MS. WRIGHT: And just as a FYI, I literally had two
11 pieces of bread in my refrigerator on Sunday. You all have a
12 great day, and God bless everybody.

13 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Well, Mr. Ballenger, Mr.
14 Dasent, do you want to, like, get in touch with her or contact
15 information or I'm not sure?

16 MR. DASENT: Yes. I encourage Ms. -- Ms. Wright to
17 look in the chat for my name. It's Andre Dasent, and we're sure
18 to help you find either the senior discount, TAP, or other
19 assistance that's available to you. And if necessary, I'll
20 direct you to my church because we have a pantry, and we want
21 people to come and access that food. So please reach out to me.
22 We will return your call, and we will answer hopefully.

23 MS. WRIGHT: And I will reach out. And is there a
24 possibility that we can get a copy of the chat?

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1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: No. Chats aren't
2 maintained after the session is done.

3 MS. WRIGHT: Oh, oh, and also in terms of picking up
4 food at different locations, if you don't have a car, how are you
5 supposed to pick up the food?

6 MR. DASENT: We'll try to come up with something for
7 that, too. If you can reach out to us, we'll try to find a
8 solution for you. And I'm sure CLS will also -- I mean the
9 Public Advocate.

10 MS. WRIGHT: I appreciate it.

11 MR. BALLENGER: Ms. Wright, please do give us a call.
12 You can call the main CLS number, which is (215)981-3700, and if
13 you have any difficulty, just ask for me. Ask for Robert
14 Ballenger. Okay?

15 MS. WRIGHT: I --

16 MR. BALLENGER: I've got a few ideas for you. So let
17 -- I'm really grateful for your testimony today, and I want to
18 make sure that if we have some resources, we can connect you with
19 that we do. Thank you very much.

20 MS. WRIGHT: Thank you very -- take care.

21 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you.

22 MS. WRIGHT: Get my hand down. Is it down?

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Ms. Wright.

24 Mr. Haver, did you have questions for Ms. Wright?

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1 MR. HAVER: I wanted to thank her for pointing out a
2 source of funds that the Water Department and the Public Advocate
3 have refused to look at. And that is all the polluters who have
4 caused the problems that make it necessary to spend so much money
5 cleaning the water before we use it. So, I commend you.

6 I'm pointing out something that the so-called experts
7 missed, that the Water Department should be seeking money from
8 the federal government for cleaning the water that was dirtied by
9 the corporate polluters. It's a shame that the Public Advocate
10 doesn't join you in making that demand.

11 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Ms. Wright, were you able
12 to get Mr. Dasent's information?

13 Steven, could you unmute her for a second?

14 MS. WRIGHT: Thank you. I have to -- I'm probably
15 going to have to go -- come out because I pushed the wrong
16 button.

17 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Well, what I was going to
18 suggest was you can send the Rate Board an email --

19 MS. WRIGHT: Okay.

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: -- and we can provide Mr.
21 Dasent's information to you directly.

22 MS. WRIGHT: Okay. Thank you. I'm going to get back
23 on. I appreciate you all for what you at least trying to do.
24 Take care. Thank you.

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1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you.

2 MR. BALLENGER: Thank you.

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

4 MR. LIANG: Thompson Thomas.

5 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Is that Thompson?

6 MR. LIANG: Yeah, Thompson. Sorry.

7 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Oh, my goodness. What
8 happened to her? She was here a second ago.

9 MR. LIANG: I think she put her hand down.

10 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: She put her hand down, but
11 I also don't see her tile. Hold on.

12 Ms. Thompson, where are you?

13 MR. LIANG: Ms. Thompson, you'll have to unmute
14 yourself.

15 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay -- okay. You need to
16 unmute her.

17 MR. LIANG: She will have to unmute herself.

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Or unmute yourself, Ms.
19 Thompson? Ms. Thompson, can you unmute yourself? No, she might
20 not be there.

21 MS. THOMPSON: Okay, okay. I'm here, I'm here, I'm
22 here.

23 MR. DASENT: There she is.

24 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

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1 MS. THOMPSON: This is Constance Thompson. I am a
2 resident and I --

3 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Wait, wait, wait. Stop,
4 stop, stop. Hold on a second, please. Let me write this down.
5 Okay. Could you please give and spell your name for the record?

6 MS. THOMPSON: C-O-N-S-T-A-N-C-E. Thompson, T-H-O-M-
7 P-S-O-N.

8 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you. And are you a
9 customer of the Philadelphia Water Department?

10 MS. THOMPSON: Yes, I am.

11 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And are you appearing on
12 behalf of any group or organization or as an individual?

13 MS. THOMPSON: Individual.

14 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you. Why don't you
15 go ahead?

16 MS. THOMPSON: Just two things. One, instead of
17 raising the rate, why don't you, Water Department, collect the
18 money that they're due from the people that don't pay? That's
19 one. And two, if you're going to raise the rates -- like the
20 woman before me, I'm a senior also -- if you're going to raise
21 the rate, are you going to raise the rate of how much we can make
22 so we can maybe be able to, like the other gentlemen, be able to
23 afford these services?

24 I'm a senior, and I can't get anything because you're

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1 \$5 over the limit. That doesn't make sense. That's my -- those
2 are my complaints.

3 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

4 MS. THOMPSON: Collect the money that's due you.
5 Like, I have neighbors that owe thousands, but you got to pull
6 them anyway. Just collect the money that's due you. And if
7 you're going to raise the rates, how about raising how much the
8 individuals, the residents, can make so they can perhaps be able
9 to collect the services, you know, get a discount on their water?

10 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

11 MS. THOMPSON: Thank you.

12 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you for both
13 suggestions. Anybody want to respond to Ms. Thompson?

14 Mr. Ballenger?

15 MR. BALLENGER: Just to say thank you for your
16 testimony, Ms. Thompson. But also I do believe that part of the
17 proposal in this proceeding would increase the income limitation
18 for the senior citizen discount. Mr. Dasent can probably correct
19 me --

20 MR. DASENT: That's correct.

21 MR. BALLENGER: -- but I do believe there is an
22 increase in the -- in the proposal, and it is supposed to go up
23 every year. So I'm optimistic that maybe things -- maybe --

24 MS. THOMPSON: Well, if it's going to go up, you got

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1 to be reasonable for someone -- you know, like I said, I'm a
2 senior. I'm feeling for the woman who's got two pieces of bread.
3 I'm able, and I have a job, but this doesn't make any sense.
4 Yes, there's stuff available, but we can't get that. That
5 doesn't make any sense.

6 And raising it from 30,000 to 31, and I don't know
7 what it is, I'm just saying. We need a sufficient amount that is
8 raised. So, like I said, I don't know if you know. I don't
9 know, but it needs to be sufficient where at least somebody, if
10 they're collecting Social Security, or you have a part-time job,
11 and that little \$5 puts them over. You know, we need help. We
12 need help. We need help. Thank you. I'm done.

13 MR. BALLENGER: Yes, Ms. Thompson. Thank you.

14 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Mr. Dasent, did you want
15 to respond?

16 Mr. Haver?

17 MR. HAVER: Ms. Thompson, thank you very much for
18 pointing out a very important issue. And that is, for every
19 dollar that the Water Department bills, how much does it collect?
20 How many real estate speculators, house flippers, and wealthy
21 people aren't paying their bills? Part of the difficulty in
22 having these hearings, before the facts are known, is we can't
23 answer that question.

24 During discovery, I will take your question and ask

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1 for it in the technical hearings. Very simply, I will ask the
2 Water Department for every dollar you bill, how much do you
3 collect? Do you collect as much as PECO does? Do you collect as
4 much as PGW does? Because I think we're going to find out the
5 answer is no.

6 MS. THOMPSON: I think you're right.

7 MR. HAVER: The Revenue Bureau does a very poor job,
8 as you pointed out. And so thank you. I will use your statement
9 on-the-record to make that discovery request. Again, (Inaudible)
10 that the hearings are before we know the facts, where someone
11 could tell you what it was, and you could raise a factual
12 objection.

13 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Mr. Dasent, did you want
14 to respond to Ms. Thompson?

15 MR. DASENT: Yes. Yes, Judge. We'd like to be able
16 to reach out to Ms. Thompson and indicate to her that they are
17 WRB representatives here today, and so she's invited to go to the
18 chat. And in the chat also is my email address. You can reach
19 out to me, and I'll put you in touch with those who can tell you
20 if we have a program that will help with ability-to-pay issues.
21 And we are also mindful that we need to collect those revenues
22 that are owed us, and we're happy to entertain those questions in
23 the technical hearings.

24 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Is that okay with you, Ms.

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1 Thompson?

2 Steven, I think you need to unmute her.

3 MR. LIANG: Yeah.

4 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Please.

5 MR. LIANG: Yeah. She needs to unmute.

6 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Steven, can you unmute Ms.
7 Thompson just so we can check that she's okay with this?

8 MR. LIANG: Yeah. She messaged that she's okay. I'm
9 trying to -- she has permission to unmute, but she'll need to
10 unmute herself.

11 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Oh, okay. Ms. Thompson,
12 you got to unmute yourself, I guess.

13 Okay. Then, I'll just leave it at that, that if you
14 reach out to Mr. Ballenger or Mr. Dasent, they can maybe guide
15 you to some resources or answer some questions that you have.

16 Okay? Okay, great.

17 Steven, who's next then?

18 MR. LIANG: Someone named Jemirah (phonetic) briefly
19 raised their hand, but they've lowered it.

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I saw that. I don't see
21 him now.

22 MR. LIANG: There he is.

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Where? Oh, I see. Okay.
24 There we go.

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1 MR. LIANG: Hello? Jemirah?

2 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Jemirah? Hi. Could you
3 please give and spell your name for the record?

4 MS. JOHNSON: Jemirah. Sorry.

5 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Jemirah. Am I saying it
6 wrong? Jemirah, can you -- are you able to, to talk to us?
7 You're not muted. Jemirah? Jemirah? Maybe I'm not saying it
8 right. Jemirah? Okay. Then, why don't we move on? We can come
9 back to Jemirah.

10 Steven, I see someone.

11 MR. LIANG: Yeah. The comcast email. I'm asking
12 them to unmute now.

13 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Did they need to
14 unmute themselves?

15 MR. LIANG: Mm-hmm.

16 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

17 MS. BROWN: Good evening. My name is Sherri Brown.
18 S-H-E-R-R-I --

19 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I'm sorry. Could you
20 start over? I was getting ready to write that down.

21 MS. BROWN: My name is Sherri Brown. S-H-E-R-R-I, B-
22 R-O-W-N.

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. And are you a
24 customer of the Water Department?

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1 MS. BROWN: Yes, I am.

2 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And are you speaking on
3 behalf of any group or organization?

4 MS. BROWN: No, for myself.

5 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

6 MS. BROWN: And anyone else that's interested.

7 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Go ahead, please.

8 MS. BROWN: Okay. My question is why has your -- why
9 has the Water Department decided not to use the federal and state
10 funding money? You know, the money that's available that the
11 City Council suggested and also the money that's left over from
12 COVID, if I'm not mistaken. Why have you all decided not to
13 utilize that money instead of raising our rates?

14 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Certainly that's a very,
15 very interesting question.

16 Mr. Dasent?

17 Because I'll be honest, I -- for the Water Department
18 should be looking for external funds before it turns to the
19 customers for rate relief. So we do want to make sure that they
20 are aggressively going after every possible dollar.

21 Right, Mr. Dasent?

22 MR. DASENT: Yes. And we have requested federal
23 assistance through --

24 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Are you having a

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1 connection problem?

2 MR. LIANG: Yeah, I believe he is.

3 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Wait, wait, wait.

4 You're still muted there. Okay. I thought we lost you, and I

5 think this is a question that we all have.

6 MR. DASENT: Yeah. Well, the Water Department has

7 sought federal funding and has in fact been successful in getting

8 WIFIA loans and PennVEST loans, which are low-interest loans.

9 And that's a \$500,000,000 grant that was -- or actually, loans

10 that were announced by the President a few weeks ago.

11 We've not gotten any grants in terms of monies that

12 can be actually used to offset either operating costs or our

13 construction costs, but we have, you know, had the conversation

14 at least with the administration about getting assistance as we

15 did in the last case. We haven't gotten an affirmative response

16 yet, although City Council indicated that we should be interested

17 in pursuing that avenue.

18 So far, we've gotten PennVEST loans, and we have

19 grants that potentially are coming, and that helps our capital

20 costs, borrowing costs; but it does not offset the need for rate

21 relief. And we will continue to ask and continue to seek funding

22 to support our customers, but at present we don't have funding to

23 offset the need for rate relief.

24 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: But I think everybody is

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1 interested in that specific City Council money. So we want to
2 know specifically about that. What efforts have you made to
3 secure it? You don't have to answer here except general, you
4 know --

5 MR. DASENT: Okay.

6 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: -- but I do advise --

7 MS. BROWN: -- to answer here.

8 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I'm sorry. Go ahead, Ms.
9 Brown.

10 MR. DASENT: Well, it's --

11 MS. BROWN: No. I was saying he could answer here as
12 far as the --

13 MR. DASENT: I can tell you where we are now, and
14 it's an ongoing conversation we're having with the City. And to
15 the degree we have the responsibility to pursue federal dollars
16 directly, we've done that looking for the WIFIA loans and the
17 PennVEST loans. But it's an ongoing conversation, and we will do
18 our best to serve our customers and lessen the burden on
19 customers going forward. But as of right now, we have to ask for
20 money because we don't have all the funds and resources that the
21 federal government presumably could offer.

22 MS. BROWN: Well, is it possible for you all to hold
23 off on these hearings until you get some -- some confirmation on
24 what is available and what isn't?

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1 MR. DASENT: No. The budget process is ongoing right
2 now, so if we have a response from either City Council or the
3 administration or both, we'll know where we are, and we'll make
4 our proposals going forward based upon that information.

5 Until then, we just continue with the grants and
6 loans and different other applications we have in the works and
7 hope to lessen burdens going forward on customers. But we got to
8 pay our bills today, and we face the same pressures that you do.
9 And that's part of the reason we're here.

10 MS. BROWN: Okay. So I don't mean to go on and on
11 about this, but just so that I have a clear understanding, is
12 that you will go ahead with the -- with the increase in rates,
13 and then once you -- whatever money you get from the government
14 or from City Council, that that money will be included -- I'm not
15 understanding. I guess, I don't understand why they can't just
16 -- why these hearings, you know, can't be put on hold for, say,
17 maybe another 30 days or, you know, whatever in order, you know,
18 to see whether or not you all can actually get some additional
19 funding where it won't affect the increase in the customers
20 rates.

21 MR. DASENT: The decision in this case --

22 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Well, Ms. Brown, I can
23 answer -- I can answer that to some extent, which is that we
24 really can't delay the hearings just because of the way the

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1 statute's written, but there are ways to deal with this when it
2 comes up during a hearing.

3 The last time this happened, there was a provision
4 worked in where that if they did get federal money, it would be
5 used to reduce any rate increase, and certainly that can be done
6 here too. But I'm afraid it's just not possible to delay the
7 filing under the way the law is written. But certainly we will
8 press the Water Department to make sure that it is aggressively
9 looking for these funds.

10 Mr. Ballenger, did you have something to say on this?
11 I assume it's something that you're looking at, too?

12 MR. BALLENGER: Yes, Judge. I mean, I think we're
13 looking at this on multiple levels, both short-term, near-term,
14 and long-term, because this is something that, you know,
15 looking -- looking into the future here, all of these increases
16 that the department is projecting are, are troubling, and we need
17 to be looking for resources beyond the TAP, as I like to say, for
18 purposes of -- of solving some of these economic problems. So we
19 are looking into this, and I do appreciate your testimony, and I
20 hope that we're able to come up with a solution that avoids the
21 need for rates to go up.

22 MS. BROWN: Thank you. I hope that there's a
23 solution also before these rates go up, because a lot of people
24 will be affected, including myself. And I am a senior also.

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1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Well, like I said, last
2 time there was a provision for a special proceeding to take -- to
3 address these types of events, and it did result in a \$3,000,000
4 rate decrease. So there are ways that we can -- we can reflect
5 this and take it into account.

6 Mr. Haver?

7 MR. HAVER: Yes. Thank you very much for raising
8 these issues. Unfortunately, you're being misled. Here's the
9 reality. The City has a tremendous amount of cash from the
10 federal COVID programs. The Mayor, who controls the Water
11 Department has told the Water Department that he will not put in
12 the budget money to make the rate increase unnecessary.

13 Instead, he wants to use the money that's in the
14 budget for two things. One, a rainy-day fund. And two, business
15 tax cuts. Now, the fact that the Hearing Examiner and the Public
16 Advocate won't tell you that is upsetting. The fact that the
17 Water Department won't tell you that isn't surprising because he
18 would have to disclose the reason why he can't go back to the
19 Mayor and demand more money is because the Mayor is his boss.

20 Now, here's the truth. The Mayor has a decision to
21 make. What's the path of least resistance? Should he give the
22 business community the tax cuts they're demanding and pay for
23 them with higher water rates? Or should he deny the water rate
24 increase and use that money to serve the people of Philadelphia

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1 and not cut business taxes? That's the question before us.

2 Ask yourself this: If the Water Department is
3 successful at getting money out of our pockets, why should the
4 Mayor give them a single penny out of the rainy-day fund?

5 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Let's move on.
6 Obviously, it's a complicated matter for the Mayor to allocate
7 money in the budget process, and I think we all recognize that he
8 has other factors to consider beside the Water Department, but we
9 certainly expect the Water Department to aggressively present
10 itself when there is money to be allocated. But of course, it's
11 not as simple.

12 MR. HAVER: Do you really want us to believe --

13 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: No. I'm not going to
14 argue with you.

15 MR. HAVER: You really want us to believe that the
16 Water Department --

17 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: No. Mr. -- Steven, you
18 have to mute him so that we can continue. We're here to hear
19 from people not engaged in this discussion. Okay.

20 Mr. (sic) Brown, are you finished, or did you have
21 another question or a comment?

22 MS. BROWN: No. I think I'm finished and thoroughly
23 confused.

24 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you. Well, the

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1 budgeting process isn't an easy one, but all I can tell you is
2 that, sure, we expect and we'll be looking at the Water
3 Department's efforts to obtain external financing. We've done it
4 before, and we will do it here, too. Okay. Let's move on then.

5 Let's go back to Jemirah. Are you there now?

6 MS. JOHNSON: Yes.

7 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Could you please
8 give and spell your name for the record? Jemirah? You're not
9 muted. Great. I can't hear you, but you're not muted from it.
10 It doesn't look like you're muted on our screen. Steven, is
11 there something from her end?

12 MR. LIANG: It's just her microphone, I think. It's
13 not working properly.

14 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Well, maybe she
15 can -- maybe she can work on that, and we'll get back to her.

16 MR. LIANG: In the meantime, next is Anthony.

17 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Anthony, do you
18 want to give and spell your name for the record, please?

19 MR. JONES: Anthony Jones.

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And could you spell that
21 for the record?

22 MR. JONES: Last name Jones, J-O-N-E-S.

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. And are you a
24 customer of the Philadelphia Water Department?

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1 MR. JONES: Yes.

2 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And are you appearing on
3 behalf of any group or organization?

4 MR. JONES: On behalf of myself as well as a member
5 of Greenpeace.

6 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

7 MR. JONES: So for me to --

8 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: But you're not speaking on
9 behalf of Greenpeace?

10 MR. JONES: No.

11 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

12 MR. JONES: As myself, but a member of Greenpeace.
13 Just for clarifying.

14 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Sure. No, that's fine.
15 Go ahead.

16 MR. JONES: Okay. So for me, the biggest questions
17 that I have so -- obviously with everything that's happening, it
18 is necessary for things to increase over time. That is
19 completely understandable. However, the questions that I do have
20 to ask is where -- how are we going to be informed of how things
21 are being allocated and where they're being sent in terms of what
22 the plan is as a whole overall? And also, if we're -- one of the
23 things that Mr. Abrams, I think -- yes. The mentioning of low-
24 income housing and those dog whistles -- so that I have to ask

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1 the question, what other areas around are being taxed as well?
2 Because it can't just be within one particular zip code. So I'd
3 like to understand how far this expansion is actually expected to
4 go.

5 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Not sure I understand your
6 specific question.

7 Maybe -- maybe Mr. Abrams, do you understand exactly
8 what he's asking you?

9 MR. JONES: I would like to know, number one, where
10 all of the money is being allocated to?

11 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I'm sorry. When you say
12 allocated to -- that's, I guess, my confusion is allocated to
13 physical parts of the City or customer groups or...

14 MR. JONES: How is it going to be broken up? If
15 you're taxing the money, where is each -- I would like to know
16 where each red cent that I'm working very hard for, as everyone
17 else on this call is as well? Where each penny is going just so
18 that we can understand and get a sense and have a vote from that
19 standpoint as well. So that we can actually be involved in the
20 conversation in terms of how things are being built from an
21 architectural standpoint. Does that make sense?

22 (CROSSTALK.)

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Well, let me see here. In
24 terms of the basis for the rates, that's in the filing. It will

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1 tell you the components that go -- the expense components and the
2 capital costs that go into the rates itself. But the rates
3 themselves are charged on water on a volumetric basis. And I
4 guess the stormwater, you know, rates are a different --
5 different story, but they're charged on a -- on a --

6 MR. JONES: But you're still not going to --

7 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: -- water --

8 MR. JONES: -- have -- the same when you go to a
9 grocery store and you -- after you purchase your items, you get
10 an itemized receipt. So essentially that's -- that's what I'm
11 trying to -- that's my question. It would be nice to have an
12 itemized receipt of where you -- if you're asking for this amount
13 of money, where is it going? How is it being spent in terms of
14 where these pockets are so that as a consumer we can say, well,
15 we would prioritize this versus this, so that we are engaged.
16 Does that make sense, or am I spinning wheels here?

17 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: No. I'm just trying to
18 put it in the context of the rate filing. Obviously, we go
19 through it in terms of expense categories and stuff like that.

20 Mr. Ballenger, did you want to take a crack at this?

21 MR. DASENT: Well, before Rob jumps in, Judge, if I
22 can? Our chemical costs have gone up dramatically, and that's a
23 big portion of the cost of this increase. And you have to have
24 the chemicals to treat the water and to deal with wastewater

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1 treatment as well. Materials and supply costs are up also
2 dramatically, and this is a phenomenon that's not unique to the
3 department.

4 Those percentage increases can be seen and are
5 documented, particularly in PWD Statement 4 in the -- in the
6 filing. Labor costs are also going up 11 percent just for labor
7 costs. It's more like 77 percent for chemical costs. And those
8 sort of anomalies are explaining why we have to ask for
9 additional funds this year as opposed to putting it off for the
10 future, and you can't defer costs that are about treating water
11 and keeping us safe.

12 And so that's part of the quandary that faces the
13 department in managing this and faces the Rate Board in making a
14 decision as to, you know, what, what level of costs are
15 justified. And, you know -- but Rob can have some input on this
16 also because we're trying to balance the interest, competing
17 interests of ratepayers and the utility.

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: You know, if you go to the
19 filing on the Rate Board's website, Mr. Jones, there's one
20 exhibit --

21 MR. JONES: Not that --

22 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: -- there's one exhibit
23 that kind of summarizes all the cost categories and the
24 components that make up the rates. No?

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1 MR. JONES: This question still -- this question that
2 I asked still was not answered.

3 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. I'm sorry then.

4 MR. JONES: In terms of concerns, I don't want to
5 hold up the rest of the meeting.

6 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: No, that's okay. We want
7 to be sure that we're clear.

8 MR. JONES: Certainly. The question still was not
9 answered. How is the money going to be allocated? You can try
10 and --

11 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I don't understand when
12 you say allocated. It goes --

13 MR. JONES: Where is it going? Like, how are you
14 spending it? So if you have -- again, let's use the grocery
15 store example. So if you go to the market, okay? You have a
16 loaf of bread, an apple, and a steak; and you don't have enough
17 money for one of the three. Which one is more important for you
18 to put back? So you, yourself, would prioritize which one you
19 would like, and your family would need. So you make that choice.
20 So that's all I'm asking. How is the funds that you're asking us
21 to pay, how is it going to be allocated?

22 It doesn't have to be an exact number, but at least
23 give me some sort of direction that you would at least want to
24 think and have your, your customers be involved in these

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1 conversations. Because I can say you might want to pick the
2 steak, but I would choose the apple. So that's where I'm coming
3 from. It's just an open conversation, not trying to poke the
4 bear, so to speak, just generally just asking questions to
5 percolate thoughts.

6 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Well, I don't think that's
7 how the Rate Board approaches it. The approach is that you look
8 at the components that comprise the requested rate increase. For
9 example, here's the projected expenses for chemicals. Here's the
10 projected expense for salaries. And the Rate Board -- and the
11 Rate Board and the Public Advocate or any other participant --
12 let me back up.

13 The Public Advocate or the participants have a chance
14 to say, no, you don't need that for your salaries. You can get
15 by with less. Or you don't need that for your chemical expenses.
16 It can be less. And then the Rate Board makes the decision. So
17 in terms of prioritizing components, probably everything in there
18 is maybe necessary to provide water. The question is, how much
19 is it going to cost? Does that answer your question better?

20 MR. JONES: It gives it a little bit of framework,
21 but we can certainly move on.

22 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: But I can tell you that
23 there isn't -- there's like one specifically useful document in
24 the filing. Is it Schedule CV-1? What's that one? Because it's

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1 just a -- it's just a chart and it shows all the components that
2 make it up and how much is requested for each of those. And
3 that's really what we kind of work off of when we go through the
4 rate determination.

5 Mr. Ballenger?

6 MR. BALLENGER: Yeah. I would just add in, and I
7 appreciate the questioning, Mr. Jones, but just to add another
8 potentially confusing layer to this, is that all of the costs,
9 all of the things that you're talking about, you know, the apple
10 or the steak, those are future apples and future steaks, right?

11 So when the department puts together its case, it
12 anticipates -- it projects what it thinks it's going to have to
13 pay for the apple, what it thinks it's going to have to pay for
14 the steak. And so some of the things that we have to do when we
15 scrutinize those costs, those cost categories, is figure out
16 whether or not those are reasonable assumptions of what the costs
17 will be in the future.

18 MR. JONES: Mm-hmm.

19 MR. BALLENGER: So we look through all of those cost
20 categories, all of the different aspects, whether it's the cost
21 of electricity, the cost of, you know the labor cost, the
22 employees of the Water Department. You know, we look at all of
23 those cost categories, and we try to determine exactly what
24 you're saying. You know, is, is this the right amount? It's not

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1 necessarily the case that we can say, don't pay the employees.
2 They have to pay the employees. But it's a question of how much
3 they will have to pay the employees. Right?

4 So we look through all of those different aspects in
5 the case, and at some point we will identify where we think the
6 biggest and most appropriate adjustments are and present those in
7 our testimony to the Board so that they know what we think based
8 on the review of the overall condition of the department, and all
9 of those -- all those estimates of future costs quite frankly.
10 That's what they are, they're estimates of future costs.

11 MR. JONES: Certainly. I work in pharmaceutical
12 advertising. And so I -- I completely understand all of the
13 budgeting and all of the players that are necessary. So thank
14 you for that clarity. My final -- to put a button on it -- the
15 last point of my question, how far is this expansion going in
16 terms of collecting money? Because, again, the previous comment
17 about low housing and things of that nature, how far -- what
18 other pockets within Philadelphia are you guys asking for this
19 rate increase, and how is the comparison between their funds, the
20 funds that you're asking for my zip code versus theirs?

21 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: It's not done by zip code.

22 MR. JONES: However, it's done.

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: It's citywide. Does that
24 answer your question?

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1 MR. JONES: I'm sorry. It's what?

2 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: It's citywide. It's not
3 done by zip code.

4 MR. JONES: Okay.

5 MR. DASENT: Every water customer bears
6 responsibility, and it's allocated hopefully on a fair,
7 reasonable basis to the various customer classes. If there was
8 one place to look, table C-6, attached to PWD Statement 7 in the
9 rate filing lists all the operation and maintenance expenses,
10 goes from 2023 up to 2028. And you can see year by year how they
11 increase. Those are our projections. That's your receipt.

12 MR. BALLENGER: And just to be clear, if you live in,
13 you know, the Northeast or Strawberry Mansion or South Philly or
14 West Philly, you would pay the same water bill based on the
15 amount of water that you use. If you're a residential customer
16 in any neighborhood in Philadelphia, you would pay the same
17 amount. And that's the way it is today, and that's the way it
18 will remain.

19 There can be differences, you know, between
20 residential and nonresidential or residential and commercial
21 properties. But all residential customers, aside from those who
22 are in programs that help, like programs for low-income
23 customers, other than those, all of the residential bills are the
24 same based on the amount of water that flows through the meter.

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1 MR. JONES: Got you. Thank you very much. I
2 appreciate all of your time and your, your consideration.

3 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you very much, Mr.
4 Jones. I hope that answered your questions. And like I say,
5 feel free to look at the filing.

6 MR. HAVER: I'd like to be heard.

7 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

8 MR. HAVER: Mr. Jones, thank you for participating,
9 and I don't want to belabor the point. Three quick points. One,
10 not all the rates are the same. Commercial, industrial,
11 residential rates are different. That's one of the places you
12 can look. Second, the Water Department gives a discount to
13 certain non-profits and other non-profits it doesn't. That's
14 another place you can look. Third, in this rate filing, the
15 Water Department establishes that it has a surplus, a very large
16 surplus of almost \$130,000,000. They call it the Rate
17 Stabilization Fund.

18 One of the things that this proposed rate increase
19 will do is increase that slush fund, increase that surplus over
20 years. So you're absolutely right. You can look at who's
21 paying, you can look at who's getting rewarding and who's
22 winning. And I think you've heard from a bunch of low-income
23 people today that working people are not winning.

24 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Anything else then?

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1 Thank you very much, Mr. Jones. I appreciate your questions.

2 Steven, is there anybody else?

3 MR. LIANG: Yeah. Jemirah has tried to call, and I'm
4 going to unmute.

5 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I'm sorry. Jemirah?

6 MR. LIANG: Jemirah. Yeah. I'm not sure how to
7 pronounce her name.

8 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

9 MS. JOHNSON: My name is Jemirah Johnson.

10 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Wait, wait, wait.
11 Can you hold on just a second while I get myself here? Could you
12 please spell your name for the record -- give and spell your name
13 for the record?

14 MS. JOHNSON: Sure. Jemirah Johnson. J-E-M-I-R-A-H.
15 Johnson, J-O-H-N-S-O-N.

16 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And are you a customer of
17 the Philadelphia Water Department?

18 MS. JOHNSON: Yes, I am.

19 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And are you appearing on
20 behalf of any group or organization?

21 MS. JOHNSON: No. Myself.

22 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

23 MS. JOHNSON: My question -- I know, you know, these
24 rates are going to take effect whether we like it or not, right?

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1 It's going to happen September 1st of 2023.

2 So I guess my first question would be, do we know
3 what the percentage is going to be at this time? And also, what
4 are we doing for the younger group? Right? We have 30, 35, 40-
5 year-olds that are just now coming out and buying homes and
6 things of that nature. And we have substantial income. We're
7 raising our family. We're doing the best that we can, but it
8 just seems like everywhere we turn, we're getting hit with
9 another increase or another bill somewhere. You know, we got
10 PECO, PGW, everywhere. So with these rates increasing, what is
11 being done for the in-between group?

12 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Well, thank you.

13 With respect to your first question, no, it hasn't
14 been set yet. That's the purpose of this proceeding is to see
15 how much or any, if any, of the proposed rates should be put into
16 effect in September. So that decision hasn't been made yet.
17 And, yes, I really sympathize with you with the impact on young
18 people, but I'm not real sure if we can answer that here. I
19 don't know if there are any particular programs or -- or avenues
20 of assistance that are -- other than those that are cost-based.
21 I mean, there's age-based programs, there's cost-based programs,
22 but I don't know.

23 Mr. Ballenger, do you want to take a crack at this?

24 MR. BALLENGER: Thanks, Judge. And thank you, Ms.

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1 Johnson, for your -- for your questions. They're thought
2 provoking, because I think we tend to focus a lot of attention on
3 seniors, and there's been some seniors who've testified here and
4 in the earlier hearing and folks who are on a fixed income. But
5 I certainly recognize that younger adults trying to build the
6 equity that they want for their families and their homes face
7 particular challenges when costs of basic essentials go up. And
8 that's why it's really important to hear from you.

9 I can't honestly tell you that I have an answer for
10 an age-based, you know, a young adult-based program for
11 assistance. These programs typically are income based regardless
12 of age, and there are, again, some programs that provide senior
13 citizen discounts.

14 But if you -- if your circumstances are -- if would
15 like us to take a look at your circumstances, your household
16 information, and try to figure out if there are programs to
17 reduce the amount of those fixed costs in your household, please
18 get in touch. My contact information is in the chat, but the
19 phone number is (215) 227-9988. We'll be glad to talk with you
20 about that.

21 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Anybody -- Mr. Dasent?

22 MR. DASENT: If I might? WRB is also -- WRB is also
23 available.

24 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I'm sorry. Andre, go

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1 ahead.

2 MR. DASENT: WRB is also -- yes. The Water Revenue
3 Bureau is also available in the chat if you wanted to do a
4 breakout session or my contact information,
5 andrecdasent@gmail.com is also in the chat. And we'd be happy to
6 try to find a program that will help you. It'll be an income-
7 based program, and it'll be, you know, either TAP or some of the
8 other customer assistance alternatives we can present. But if
9 you haven't had that conversation, we welcome you to have a
10 conversation with WRB. And if you can do it tonight, that's
11 great. If you want to do it later, reach out to me via email.
12 Thank you.

13 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Ms. Johnson, does that
14 satisfy you, or do you have a further question?

15 MR. LIANG: She was disconnected, but she's still
16 able to hear. She just can't speak.

17 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Well, Ms. Johnson,
18 feel free to email the Rate Board if you have further questions
19 or follow up. That would be fine. And we can -- we'll either
20 address it or convey it to Mr. Dasent or Mr. Ballenger. Okay?

21 Okay. Steven, is there anybody else?

22 MR. LIANG: Not as far as I can tell.

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Well, that's the
24 end of -- this is anybody's last chance to raise your hand or

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1 speak up. I'll ask Steven to unmute everybody just in case you
2 want to speak up and don't know how to raise your hand, because
3 if you haven't given us your comments, we'd certainly be
4 interested in hearing them.

5 Steven, can you unmute everybody? Just somebody can
6 talk, and we can just do it that way?

7 MR. LIANG: Yeah. Anyone that wishes to speak can
8 unmute themselves now.

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. I mean, it's
10 helpful if you raise your hand. There we go. Hazel?

11 MS. PATTERSON: Hi. Yes. My name is Hazel, H-A-Z-E-
12 L. Patterson, P-A-T-T-E-R-S-O-N. I am --

13 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Excuse me. Are you a
14 customer of the Philadelphia Water Department?

15 MS. PATTERSON: Yes, I am.

16 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And are you appearing on
17 behalf of any group or organization?

18 MS. PATTERSON: Myself and all the low income or
19 elderly people.

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Why don't you go
21 ahead?

22 MS. PATTERSON: I been going through something with
23 the Water Department. They saying that I owe a water bill since
24 2019, up to 3,700 and something. And I brought bank statements

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1 down there showing them that I paid my water bill. But also the
2 Water Department left something on my door stating that they
3 wanted to get in and they were changing the water meters all
4 across, you know, in the neighborhood. So I allowed them to come
5 in.

6 They put a box in, and they're saying that I didn't
7 have no water usage for over three years. How could that even
8 happen? You know. If you guys knew that your meter was faulty
9 or whatever, you should have come back out sooner or contact me
10 sooner. I still paid the bill because I had bank statements that
11 I put down there and tried to show them, and nobody wanted to
12 look at the bank statements.

13 Then I let them come back in and change the meter
14 thing. They did it twice. One, the first one, I guess it was
15 the faulty box. The second one was that they, you know, put a
16 new one in and now they could read the water or whatever. So
17 they're saying they going by -- they saying that for three years
18 or whatever. Then when I did go to the hearing, they're saying
19 now it was way less than that, but still, how did it end up to
20 \$3,700?

21 Like I said, I got bank statements stating that, you
22 know, I've been paying my bill. It's not my fault that they
23 screwed up. I still was paying a bill. I have bank statements
24 stating that those checks were cashed by the Water Department.

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1 So what's going on with that? What they're trying to get me to
2 pay somebody else's bill or something? I don't understand.

3 And I asked them before to look at it. I even went
4 back down to -- what is that -- 15th and Arch -- 15th and
5 Chestnut, on the 6th floor. And I asked them to look at the
6 bill. They allowed me to come in there. I think he's called
7 something Master or whatever. But anyway, I sat down. He was
8 going to look at the bill. Soon as I pull things out, he said,
9 oh, I can't look at this and send me away. So I'm like, okay,
10 I'm confused.

11 Nobody's sitting down talking to me how I owe, you
12 know, to talk to me, to tell me how I owe this bill. You know, I
13 go to legal aid about all of this. And she, you know, was saying
14 to me, they're trying to say that you was only paying a service
15 bill and not usage or whatever. I told her about the two boxes
16 that they came in and installed at different times. And it's not
17 my fault that they installed a faulty box. You know? As you can
18 see, I never tried to get out of paying my bill. We always paid
19 our bill.

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Ms. Patterson, I
21 think you're kind of lucky tonight because we can direct you to
22 people who will deal directly with you and will resolve this.

23 Andre?

24 MR. DASENT: Yes.

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1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Can somebody get together
2 with Ms. Patterson and work this out?

3 MR. DASENT: Yes.

4 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Is that okay with you, Ms.
5 Patterson?

6 MR. DASENT: Ms. Patterson, we'd be happy to talk
7 with you, and, you know, find our way through this. It sounds
8 like you've been through an extensive process already, but we're
9 not exhausted we're just beginning in terms of at least my
10 involvement and WRB's involvement, and we'll try to sort this
11 out. And I'm sure Mr. Ballenger will help.

12 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Mr. Dasent, I'd like you
13 to be personally involved in this.

14 MS. PATTERSON: Can I --

15 MR. DASENT: I have no problem in doing that.

16 MS. PATTERSON: -- can I --

17 MR. DASENT: I'm sorry?

18 MS. PATTERSON: So how are you -- how are you
19 planning to help me with this when they stuck me with the bill
20 and telling me to get on the program? I put --

21 MR. DASENT: Because I just have to take a fresh look
22 at it, and I -- and the Judge just told me to. And so that's
23 exactly what I'm going to do.

24 MS. PATTERSON: Okay.

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1 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Ms. Patterson, we're going
2 to cut through all the frustration and jumping through the hoops.
3 Mr. Dasent will take care of this for you. Okay?

4 Mr. Ballenger, did you want to jump in too?

5 MR. BALLENGER: Hi, Ms. Patterson. I've had clients
6 over the years with these types of experiences, so I think I
7 understand the frustration that you've been going through. And I
8 know based on some of the locations you mentioned, some of the
9 players you've been involved with. So I'm glad that the Judge is
10 directing us to talk about this some more. Andre, I'll be in
11 touch.

12 MS. PATTERSON: Yes.

13 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay.

14 MR. DASENT: Please look in the chat for our contact
15 information because I do not want this to fall through the
16 cracks. So tell me, you know, if you see our names. And, Rob,
17 you can give a number right now.

18 MR. BALLENGER: I will -- sure. Yes. We will be in
19 touch. You don't have to worry, Andre.

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay, great. Thank you.

21 Thank you, Ms. Patterson.

22 MS. PATTERSON: Yes. Thank you.

23 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you.

24 Ms. Thelmon (phonetic), I see you have a hand up.

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1 Did you want to make a statement? I think you need to unmute
2 yourself. Ms. Thelmon? Zipporah Thelmon? Okay. Maybe we'll
3 get back -- oh, are you there? Ms. Thelmon, you're still muted.
4 Ms. Thelmon, you need to unmute yourself, please. Okay. While
5 she gets herself -- is there anybody else, then, while we're
6 waiting for Ms. Thelmon to unmute herself? I don't see any
7 hands, or does somebody want to speak up? No?

8 MR. FIZZ: I have a question, if I may?

9 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Who is speaking?

10 MR. FIZZ: It's Patrick.

11 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Well, you got to make it
12 quick, Mr. -- Mr. Fizz. You really have had quite a bit of time.
13 You've already had your chance. But while we're waiting for Ms.
14 Thelmon, why don't you go ahead?

15 MR. FIZZ: I just have a question being if enough
16 people speak up against the rate increase, will that have any, I
17 guess you could say leverage? Will that play a part? Or, like,
18 I think the one woman earlier mentioned, is the rate increase
19 going to happen regardless?

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Well, I can't really
21 answer that directly. It's not like it's a referendum or a vote.
22 But certainly the more people who speak up, the more of an impact
23 it will have on the Rate Board in reminding them of who was
24 affected by these rates. So it can't do any harm, certainly.

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1 MR. FIZZ: Okay. Thank you.

2 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Sure. Ms. Thelmon, have
3 you ever -- are you able to unmute yourself yet? No. How about
4 Ms. Langston?

5 MS. LANGSTON: Oh, yes. Can you hear me?

6 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Yes, we can. Can you give
7 and spell your name for the record, please?

8 MS. LANGSTON: Charlene Langston. C-H-A-R-L-E-N-E.
9 Last name L-A-N-G-S-T-O-N.

10 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And are you a customer of
11 the Water Department?

12 MS. LANGSTON: Yes.

13 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: And are you here appearing
14 on behalf of any organization or group?

15 MS. LANGSTON: No. Just myself.

16 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay, fine. Why don't you
17 go ahead?

18 MS. LANGSTON: Yeah. Hi. I am new -- actually a new
19 customer. I recently lost my mother last year at the age of 99.
20 So this is her house, and this is all new for me. I am new to
21 paying the bills and stuff, but I would like to piggyback off of
22 Ms. Thompson's statement earlier about the -- having, like,
23 paying over -- I mean, where you don't qualify because you make
24 too much money.

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1 My mother was, of course, a senior citizen, not
2 working. And with her -- with her Social Security and her --
3 she only made about \$1,600 a month, and she still was never able
4 to qualify to get any assistance. So what is the -- what is the
5 level or the amount of money that we are supposed to be at in
6 order to qualify for any kind of assistance? So far, I'm doing
7 okay with it, but I'm just curious.

8 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Well, Mr. Ballenger, can
9 you answer that quickly? Because otherwise, I was going to
10 suggest that perhaps, Ms. Langston, you could talk to Mr.
11 Ballenger or Mr. Dasent and see if there's some -- see what you
12 can qualify for, whether it's a senior citizen discount or TAP or
13 some other program.

14 MS. LANGSTON: I'm 68 myself, so I am a senior
15 citizen, and I am retired, and I'm on a pension.

16 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Why don't you talk
17 directly to them and see --

18 MR. BALLENGER: And the fastest way is really to --
19 I'm sorry, Judge.

20 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: No. Go ahead, Mr.
21 Ballenger.

22 MR. BALLENGER: The fastest way one of the things
23 that, you know, sort of the -- when we were able to successfully
24 get the City to implement the low-income program, it also -- the

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1 ordinance that City Council passed requires that on the back end,
2 the Water Department has to basically determine the most
3 affordable rate for you.

4 MS. LANGSTON: Mm-hmm.

5 MR. BALLENGER: So there's a single application
6 called the Customer Assistance Application. It's available --
7 you can do it online, or you can request it from the Water
8 Department. They will send it to you, happily, I believe.

9 And when you submit all of the information with that,
10 they will determine what program is the most affordable to you,
11 based on the amount of water that you use in the home and based
12 on your monthly bills, and your income. That's the fastest way
13 to really answer the question without getting hyper technical. I
14 wanted to mention however, is the home still in your mother's
15 name?

16 MS. LANGSTON: No. It's in my name now.

17 MR. BALLENGER: Okay. Very good, because sometimes
18 we run into tangled title issues where a property is still held
19 or the deed is still in the name of the -- of the departed family
20 member, and that's something that we could offer to at least
21 advise on, if not assist. But I'm glad to hear that it's in your
22 name. That means you really should have no obstacle to
23 submitting that application, having the City determine what
24 programs you may be eligible for.

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1 MS. LANGSTON: Okay.

2 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Okay. Does that answer
3 your question?

4 MS. LANGSTON: Yes, ma'am. That's good. Thank you.

5 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Thank you. Appreciate you
6 taking the time to come. I'll repeat again that if anybody wants
7 to make a statement at this point, raise your hand. And do that
8 by going down to the reactions and hitting the hand symbol. Or
9 if you're on a phone, hit star six, I think, to raise a hand, and
10 star nine to unmute yourself, because otherwise I don't...

11 Steven? Did you just say something?

12 MR. LIANG: No, that wasn't me.

13 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Oh, I'm sorry. Anybody
14 else?

15 UNIDENTIFIED: If I may ask one question, and I did
16 put it in the chat. Is there any representation from City
17 Council or the mayor's office on these calls? Thank you.

18 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Well, I saw the same chat,
19 although I don't usually look at it, but I do not identify people
20 like that unless they want to be identified. Now, if they want
21 to be identified, that's fine, but I didn't get a request. So if
22 somebody does want to identify themselves, that's fine. But I
23 don't see any reason why you couldn't contact City Council
24 yourself.

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1 UNIDENTIFIED: (Indiscernible.)

2 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: Pardon me?

3 UNIDENTIFIED: (Indiscernible.)

4 HEARING OFFICER CHESTNUT: I'm sorry. I still didn't
5 hear you.

6 All right. I think we've come to the end of this
7 session. As I said earlier, we'll be meeting again with another
8 series of public hearings tomorrow, 3:00 and 6:00. And I think
9 we've got some of the issues from this afternoon worked out
10 though fingers crossed that it goes smoothly. Anything else from
11 anybody? Okay, then. Thank you very much.

12 And thank you, Stacy.

13 MR. DASENT: Thank you, Judge.

14 (Hearing concluded at 7:43 p.m.)

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

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

STACY L. RAUB

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