

1 CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
2 WATER, SEWER & STORM WATER RATE BOARD

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8 IN RE: Public Hearing on the Water
9 Department's Intent to Raise
10 Water Rates

11 DATE: Wednesday, April 23, 2025

12 LOCATION: Zion Baptist Church
13 3600 North Broad Street at Venango
14 Philadelphia, PA 19140

15 Reported by: Heidi Schoentube

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Job No.:

53439

1 ATTENDANCE

2 SONNY POPOWSKY, BOARD CHAIR

3 DEBRA MCCARTHY, PANEL MEMBER

4 ADRIANA GONZALEZ, WRB COUNSEL

5
6 ALSO PRESENT:

7 ANDRE DASENT, COUNSEL FOR THE WATER DEPARTMENT

8 VIC PATEL, COUNSEL FOR THE PUBLIC

9 GLEN ABRAMS, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER, COMMUNICATIONS
AND ENGAGEMENT, WATER DEPARTMENT

10 CHRIS LONG, RESIDENT

11 LISA SPERA, RESIDENT

12 JUDITH SUSSHOLTZ, RESIDENT

13 JILLIAN TADRZYNSKI, RESIDENT

14 MACALLISTER GARTNER, RESIDENT

15 ANTONIA BATTS, RESIDENT

16 THOMAS SKOKAN, RESIDENT

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1		
2	INDEX	
3	RESIDENT	PAGE
4	Chris Long	14
5	Lisa Spera	23
6	Judith Sussholtz	29
7	Jillian Tadrzynski	37
8	MacAllister Gartner	45
9	Antonia Batts	53
10	Thomas Skokan	57
11	-----	
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		
21		
22		
23		
24		

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2 PROCEEDINGS

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4 CHAIR POPOWSKY: I'd like to get
5 started. Thank you. Hi. There's a sign up
6 sheet in the back for anyone who hasn't yet -
7 - who wants to, to speak tonight and who
8 hasn't given us their name yet. My name is
9 Sonny Popowsky. I'm the chairman of the
10 Philadelphia Water, Sewer & Storm Water Rate
11 Board. I want to thank everyone for coming
12 out this evening to, to participate in this
13 hearing, and I'd like to call the hearing to
14 order. I want, want to go -- I want to go
15 pretty quickly, because I know we have a
16 gentleman who's -- who wants to speak, but
17 has other business tonight. So how much time
18 do you have?

19 MR. LONG: Just take your time.

20 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Oh, okay. Thank
21 you.

22 MR. LONG: I will work --

23 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Thank you. As I
24 said, my name is Sonny Popowsky. I'm the

1 chairman of the Philadelphia Water, Sewer &
2 Storm Water Rate Board. With me today is my
3 fellow Rate Board member, Deb McCarthy.
4 We're part of a five-member independent
5 volunteer board, who are appointed by the
6 mayor and confirmed by City Council to set
7 the rates charged by the Philadelphia Water
8 Department for Water, Sewer & Storm Water
9 Service in the City of Philadelphia.

10 On, on march 31st, 2025, the Water
11 Department filed its formal notice of a
12 request to raise its rates beginning
13 September 1st, 2025, and again on September
14 1, 2026. The amount of the increase
15 requested by the Water Department for
16 individual customers will vary based on your
17 water usage, but for a typical residential
18 customer, the Water Department has stated
19 that it is seeking to increase the total
20 monthly bill by about 11.7 percent in
21 September 2025 from \$81.77 to \$91.31, and by
22 an additional 5.9 percent to \$96.68 per month
23 by September -- in September 2026.

24 The formal participants to the

1 water proceeding include the Water
2 Department, the public advocate, who is
3 appointed by the board to represent the
4 interests of residential and small commercial
5 customers, a group of large water customers,
6 the Philadelphia Water Department of -- the
7 City Department of Revenue -- I'm sorry, the
8 City Water Revenue Bureau, which is a part of
9 the city's Department of Revenue, that
10 provides billing and collection services for
11 the Water Department, and also operates the
12 department's customer assistance programs.
13 And we also have two individual customers who
14 are participants.

15 Next month, Hearing Officer -- we
16 have a hearing officer, Ms. Marlane Chestnut,
17 who has had a prehearing conference, and next
18 month she will lead technical hearings to
19 examine the formal statements and exhibits
20 provided by the participants, which will be
21 considered by the hearing officer and by the
22 Rate Board in developing the final rate
23 determination in this proceeding.

24 But the purpose of today's hearing

1 is to hear from you, the customers of the
2 Philadelphia Water Department, with respect
3 to any concerns or questions you may have
4 regarding these proposed rate increases. I
5 will ask -- I will -- some -- couple folks,
6 have already signed up. Again, if anyone
7 else wants to sign, please, check the sign up
8 sheet in the back of the room. I'll ask you
9 to speak. I'll just ask your, your name and
10 whether you're a customer of the Water
11 Department.

12 Also, if you have any specific
13 questions that you don't want to raise
14 publicly in front of all these folks, we have
15 people here from the Water Department who can
16 answer individual questions about your --
17 about your bills or about your service, if
18 you'd like to talk to those individuals. We
19 don't have a big crowd tonight, so I won't
20 set any specific time limits on your
21 presentation. I would ask that you come
22 forward when I call on your -- when I call
23 your name and try to speak loudly and slowly,
24 because everything we say is being taken down

1 by the court reporter and will be part of
2 the, the record of this proceeding.

3 You're welcome to stay for the
4 entire proceeding, but you don't have to.
5 You're certainly free to go after you made
6 your, your statement. Now, before I call on
7 members of the public, I would ask -- sorry,
8 we have some more individuals here. If
9 you're planning to present testimony, I would
10 ask, could you sign your name in the back?
11 I'm sorry -- no, there's another -- there's
12 another sheet here. Just sign your name and
13 we'll -- I'm going to have to repeat all
14 that.

15 Let me just -- wow, this is great.
16 So, since we have so many new, new folks
17 here, I, I don't want to repeat everything we
18 just said, but I will give a slight short
19 introduction again after the parties, the
20 participants, have had a chance to introduce
21 themselves very briefly, and then we'll hear
22 from the members of the public. So we'll
23 start with the Water Department. Andre?

24 MR. DASENT: Thank you. If you

1 don't mind --

2 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Sure.

3 MR. DASENT: -- I'll direct my
4 attention to the -- to the audience. Good
5 evening, everyone, and welcome. I'm so glad
6 that you've come, and we want to hear you
7 this evening. So we have plenty of time to
8 hear each and every one of you that signed up
9 to, to speak. I'm outside counsel to the
10 Philadelphia Water Department, and with me
11 this evening is Adriana Gonzalez from WRB
12 who's also a counsel serving on this case.

13 Most importantly, with me this
14 evening is Glen Abrams, who is our deputy
15 commissioner at the Water Department for
16 communications and engagement, and he will
17 have brief opening remarks.

18 MR. ABRAMS: Thank you. As Mr.
19 Desant said, my name is Glen Abrams, and I
20 serve as deputy commissioner of
21 communications and engagement at the
22 Philadelphia Water Department. Today I'm
23 speaking on behalf of the department in this
24 proceeding.

1 We first want to thank you for
2 joining us tonight and to share your views
3 about the rate increase request that the
4 Water Department has filed with the
5 Philadelphia Water, Sewer & Storm Water Rate
6 Board. The Water Department provides
7 drinking water, sanitary, sewer, and storm
8 water services to residential, commercial,
9 and industrial customers within the City.
10 These services are essential and the
11 foundation of public health in Philadelphia.

12 We recently requested an adjustment
13 in rates and charges so that we have
14 sufficient resources to continue current and
15 planned programs and to pay for significantly
16 increasing operating costs in fiscal years
17 2026 and 2027. Additional revenues are
18 needed to ensure that clean water is
19 delivered safely and reliably as possible,
20 and that wastewater treatment and storm water
21 management services meet your needs and the
22 needs of our shared environment while also
23 meeting regulatory requirements.

24 The Water Department recognizes

1 that any increase in rates can be a hardship,
2 especially right now, but this increase is
3 necessary to maintain essential services and
4 address the department's current and planned
5 projects. The Water Department is not a for-
6 profit corporation and your monthly water
7 bill supports the work that we do, not the
8 city budget or taxes.

9 We are engineers, laborers,
10 scientists, customer service representatives,
11 and most importantly, neighbors and fellow
12 consumers of the water that every
13 Philadelphian depends on. When we request
14 higher rates, we only request what we project
15 will be needed in the coming years. And we
16 show our customers why we are requesting
17 these amounts through this public rate
18 setting process. You can find a slide
19 presentation on the Rate Board website that
20 helps explain why a rate increase is
21 necessary at the start time.

22 Finally, we want to -- want you to
23 know that Philadelphia has robust and
24 comprehensive customer assistance programs

1 which help low income customers pay their
2 bills, including the Tiered Assistance
3 Program or TAP, the Senior Citizen Discount,
4 and other programs that are more flexible
5 than ever. If you're experiencing hardship,
6 we want to help. You can use one application
7 for TAP, the Senior Discount or other
8 programs available to assist households.

9 These programs are accessible
10 through our website at
11 www.phila.gov./waterbillhelp, or by calling
12 215-685-6300, Monday through Friday, between
13 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. I would also note
14 that if you had specific billing questions or
15 other service issues you would like
16 assistance with, we have customer service
17 representatives at the back of the room, if
18 you could just wave at us. Perfect. Those
19 folks over there would be happy to help.

20 I'll wrap up because the purpose of
21 today's session is to hear from you, our
22 customers. We appreciate you taking the time
23 to share your views with us today and we look
24 forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

1 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Thank you. We'll
2 now hear from the, the public advocate.

3 MR. PATEL: Good evening, everyone.
4 My name is Vic Patel, and I'm an attorney at
5 Community Legal Services. CLS has been
6 appointed to serve as the public advocate in
7 this rate proceeding. The public advocate's
8 job is to independently represent the
9 interests of residential and small commercial
10 customers receiving water services at just
11 and reasonable rates.

12 We encourage you to share your
13 concerns about the proposed rate increase by
14 speaking here today, by providing input to
15 the Board in writing. If you'd like more
16 information or would want to learn more about
17 our work or would like assistance in
18 providing information to the Board, please
19 contact us directly. You can reach us at --
20 and I'll be around afterwards also. But you
21 can reach us at 215-227-9988, or at
22 publicadvocate@cls.org. And once again, I'll
23 also be around afterwards if anyone wants to
24 speak. Thank you.

1 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Thank you. I
2 don't believe there are any other formal
3 participants here, so I'd like to first call
4 on the first couple of folks who were here,
5 and then I'll get the names of the additional
6 people who just more recently signed in. So,
7 Mr. Long?

8 MR. LONG: You want me to come up?

9 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Yes, please, if
10 you don't mind.

11 MR. LONG: Okay.

12 CHAIR POPOWSKY: And wait. And
13 please state your -- please state and spell
14 your name for us?

15 MR. LONG: Chris Long, L-O-N-G.

16 CHAIR POPOWSKY: And are you a
17 customer of Philadelphia Water?

18 MR. LONG: Yes, yes, sir.

19 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Okay. Thank you.
20 Please go ahead and say what you have to say.

21 MR. LONG: I was happy to see they
22 didn't have the video presentation like they
23 used to have back in the day. I'm so glad we
24 stopped with that. I've been a customer off

1 and on and been coming to these functions
2 about 40 years now. They changed over the
3 years, of course, but I felt I haven't been
4 in -- in about five years, I haven't come to
5 one of these rate increases. But I felt
6 compelled to come today, because I just
7 wanted to say something about what I've been
8 seeing.

9 I want to call it for what it is.
10 They, they want a raise. They have -- they
11 have a, a payroll to take care of, and they,
12 they have a budget they have to fulfill, so
13 they want a rate, rate increase. Now, when I
14 come to these functions, they always say they
15 want to fix the water infrastructure. All
16 the rate increases I've been -- meetings I've
17 been to, we should probably have the best
18 water infrastructure in the world by now. I
19 mean, really.

20 So I, I, I really know that was a
21 false flag anyway. But I mean, I want to get
22 to the waste that I see with the Water
23 Department. And I heard on the news a couple
24 weeks ago that a fire hydrant -- there was a

1 fire in the City, and they wanted to use the
2 fire hydrant, and it wasn't working. So I, I
3 was thinking about that and I was wondering
4 how many fire hydrants we have in, in, in our
5 system that's not working, and do we know
6 about that? Can somebody answer that?

7 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Yeah. The, the
8 Department can try to answer your questions.
9 And if they can't answer your questions here,
10 they will get back to you, I assure you.

11 MR. LONG: Okay.

12 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Go ahead. This is
13 Mr. Dasent?

14 MR. DASENT: I can't give you an
15 exact number, but I can provide that
16 information to you. And I'll give you my
17 email address so that you'll be able to
18 communicate with me directly and I'll get
19 that number for you.

20 MR. LONG: Okay. That's very
21 important, okay, to me. And I'm sure people
22 that have a house, that's very important that
23 you know what fire hydrants work and which
24 ones don't, because our houses burning down.

1 Okay. So --

2 MS. MCCARTHY: So, I, I can
3 actually tell you that the Fire Department is
4 responsible for, once a year, testing all the
5 hydrants to make sure they work. And if they
6 don't, they report that to the Water
7 Department. So it's a -- it's partnership
8 with the Fire Department and the Water
9 Department.

10 MR. LONG: Okay. So --

11 MS. MCCARTHY: But if you know your
12 hydrant doesn't work, please call it into the
13 Water Department.

14 MR. LONG: Okay. Now, let me ask
15 you a question. Whose job is it to maintain
16 the fire hydrants and shut them off or shut
17 them on when they need to be? That's the
18 Water Department --

19 MS. MCCARTHY: The Water department
20 is maintaining the hydrant.

21 MR. LONG: Okay. So I worked
22 around the City, so I drive around the City.
23 I have some pictures here of different fire
24 hydrants that, that I've visited, where

1 people just pull up and, and take water
2 anytime they want. I actually talked to a
3 gentleman and he rented a 10,000 gallon water
4 truck, and he lives in Jersey, and he came to
5 Philly to get water. And I'm like, "Why are
6 you coming to Philly?" "Because it's free in
7 Philly." Now, I thought about this, because
8 over the years, I've been seeing this over
9 the years, and I'm thinking to myself, "We've
10 been wasting water for decades." I mean,
11 billions and billions of dollars for decades,
12 and yet you want to come to the taxpayers and
13 say you want a rate increase when you had
14 money under your -- right under your nose and
15 you wasn't using it.

16 Now, I want to ask another
17 question. These contractors that's building
18 all these buildings around the City, what do
19 you charge them for?

20 MR. DASENT: I don't know what the
21 exact charge is --

22 MR. LONG: You're saying you don't
23 know?

24 MR. DASENT: -- but there is -- no

1 -- but there is -- there is a charge. I just
2 have to get that information for you.

3 MR. LONG: Now, let me -- let me --
4 let me explain what I see, okay? I'm a
5 contractor, okay? And I'm building this
6 building. I go to Mr. Santiago over here and
7 say, "I want you to do this, boom, boom,
8 boom," but he needs water to do that project.

9 MR. DASENT: Right.

10 MR. LONG: He'll get his wrench out
11 the back of his truck, go to the fire
12 hydrant, and get his water for free. You
13 think he's going give you a bill? No, he's
14 doing it for free.

15 So, see, this is going on every day
16 around the City, and it's out of control, but
17 you come to us and you want to raise. That's
18 what I'm saying. And you know what's crazy
19 about it? These renters that they open a
20 fire hydrant away, anybody can buy. So how
21 do you protect the water that we pay for if
22 anybody can have access to it?

23 Now, if -- I got hundreds of
24 pictures like that. And I'm talking about

1 they come as far away from Maryland to get
2 free water in Philadelphia. And y'all have
3 no clue about it. And I'm wondering why. So
4 that's what I wanted to say. So I'm totally
5 against the rate increase because they've
6 been stealing our money for years.

7 Another problem they have is
8 company vehicles, using them for personal
9 use. I see that all the time. So there's so
10 much waste I can -- I could be talking all
11 day. So I got to go but I'm totally against
12 the rate increase. Come to us when you can
13 tell us where our water is going, that's what
14 I want to say.

15 MS. MCCARTHY: So, sir, I would ask
16 that, would you please, if you see hydro
17 abuse, which is what it is, to call 685-6300
18 --

19 MR. LONG: I'm going to do that in
20 the future, but I'm going to tell you
21 something. That's their job. They should
22 know where the water's going, and they should
23 have a system in place, if somebody illegally
24 turn on a hydrant, they should know about it.

1 MS. MCCARTHY: And, and if you see
2 an employee abusing, you know, a vehicle as
3 you said --

4 MR. LONG: Oh, I, I, I, I, I called
5 that in, but they didn't do nothing. I can
6 go right now to my house right now, and
7 you'll see one of your vehicles parked down
8 the street from there, and they use it all
9 the time for personal use. I mean, there's,
10 there's so much waste. So let them get their
11 stuff in order before you give them a, a rate
12 increase. Tighten up the belt first.

13 MS. MCCARTHY: I appreciate your,
14 your comment.

15 MR. LONG: Thank you.

16 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Thank you, sir.
17 Would you like us to keep the -- these
18 pictures?

19 MS. MCCARTHY: Mr. Long? Mr. Long?

20 CHAIR POPOWSKY: You'd like us to
21 keep these?

22 MR. LONG: Yeah, you can have them.
23 I got them on my computer.

24 CHAIR POPOWSKY: (indiscernible).

1 Thank you. The, the second person that
2 signed up was Sheila Greg Johnson. Did you
3 want to speak today?

4 MS. JOHNSON: Okay. Thank you.
5 Okay. We have some additional folks that
6 have signed up. And since you came a little
7 late, let me just give a quick introduction
8 so you at least you know who we are here. My
9 name is Sonny Popowsky. I'm the chairman of
10 the Philadelphia Water, Sewer & Storm Water
11 Rate Board. With me here today is Deb
12 McCarthy, who's a fellow member of our Board.

13 We are an independent volunteer
14 board of five members. We are appointed by
15 the mayors and then confirmed by City
16 Council. And our job is to independently
17 review and set the rates for the Philadelphia
18 Water, Sewer & Storm Water Department, which
19 as, as you intended to know, is a
20 municipally-owned water utility here in the
21 city of Philadelphia.

22 So the purpose of this hearing
23 today, we will have hearings later next month
24 addressing a large number of technical issues

1 regarding the rate request that the
2 department has made, but today's hearing is
3 designed to hear from members of the public
4 and customers of Philadelphia Water
5 Department.

6 So I will call the folks who have
7 signed up, ask you to come forward if you're
8 willing to do so, just state and spell your
9 name and let us know if you are -- you are a
10 customer of the Water Department, and if, if
11 you are representing a larger group or just
12 speaking on your own behalf. So let me start
13 with Lisa Spera.

14 MS. SPERA: Hello.

15 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Hi, how are you?

16 MS. SPERA: Stand over here?

17 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Yes, please.

18 MS. SPERA: Okay. Facing you or
19 facing them?

20 CHAIR POPOWSKY: It's, it's up to
21 you. We, we can hear you. If you want to
22 face them --

23 MS. SPERA: Okay. I'll go like
24 half and half.

1 CHAIR POPOWSKY: It's important to
2 go to the --

3 MS. MCCARTHY: The microphone.

4 MS. SPERA: The microphone's there.
5 Okay, I got you. All right. So this is my
6 son. My name is Lisa Spera, L-I-S-A S-P-E-
7 R-A, and I am a delegate from the
8 Philadelphia County Workers' Benefit Council.

9 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Oh, Workers'
10 Benefit Council? Okay. Thank you.

11 MS. SPERA: I represent thousands
12 of low-pay service workers throughout
13 Philadelphia. And I've worked on numerous
14 cases advocating for others who have
15 struggled to afford the rates from the Water
16 Department. I've even assisted members who
17 are being charged exorbitant amounts because
18 they were unaware that their meter was broken
19 until they got charged by the Water
20 Department to the tune of hundreds of -- or
21 thousands of dollars.

22 One senior citizen on a fixed
23 income told us that he received a lien on his
24 property without any notice because of his

1 water bill. It's unfortunate that as a
2 person enters their golden years, they can
3 now expect three things: death, taxes, and
4 raised rates. The Philadelphians I have
5 advocated for generally work sporadic jobs
6 for low pay. Most of the people in the City
7 are either underpaid, unemployed, or
8 underemployed.

9 Our fuel -- our labor fuels the
10 rising profits of corporations from Amazon to
11 Uber to Doordash, who provide big investor
12 payments passed by paying workers poverty
13 wages.

14 Now, Water Department is
15 considering another rate increase of \$220
16 million despite getting a rate increase of
17 12.3 percent or \$162 million last year. On
18 top of that, the Water Rate Board is going to
19 pursue another rate increase in 2026 of 12.8
20 percent. If the water Rate Board continues
21 to approve these rate hikes, then ratepayers
22 will be paying 35.12 percent by 2027.

23 In addition, the City is planning
24 on raising their property taxes, but -- plus

1 PCUB just got their rate increase of \$353
2 million and now PGW wants to raise their
3 rates as well. Where exactly do you think
4 all this money is going to come from? Wages
5 haven't increased. The price of everything
6 is already sky high. No one is getting wage
7 income increases to cover these rate hikes.
8 Working people simply do not have it.

9 What the notice from the Water
10 Department doesn't speak of is the amount of
11 debt the City and the Water Department have
12 put itself into in order to maintain its bond
13 status. As soon as the last rate increase
14 went into effect in September 2024, the City
15 issued a \$5,905,780 in bonds to private
16 financial interests. Already the bond status
17 from the Water Department stands at
18 \$3,176,031,686. The bondholders are Siebert
19 William Shank & Company, Jefferies Blaylock
20 Van, LLC, FHN Capital Markets, Janney
21 Montgomery Scott.

22 If the Water Department bond status
23 stands at over 3 billion and they just issued
24 almost a half billion in bonds, then the real

1 question is, who will benefit from this rate
2 increase? I'll give you a hint. It's not
3 us. The City and state have a history of
4 handing out property tax abatements and low
5 corporate tax rates to big corporations.

6 Just in 2022, the state cut
7 corporate income taxes in half. This cost
8 Philadelphians almost \$130 million in 2023
9 alone. But when it's time to fund the water
10 system, the tab is handed to those of us who
11 end up robbing Peter to pay Paul even more.
12 Do you know what would come of a rate
13 increase?

14 MS. MCCARTHY: No. What would
15 come?

16 MS. SPERA: Shut offs. That's what
17 you get when you have a rate increase, shut
18 offs. Water is a life, not luxury -- not a
19 luxury. It's, it's for life. In September
20 of 2015, 10 years ago, the 193 member nations
21 of the United Nations General Assembly,
22 including the United States, unanimously
23 agreed to endorse the 2030 Sustainable
24 Development Goals and to work tirelessly to

1 implement them.

2 Goal number six is to ensure
3 availability and sustainable management of
4 water and sanitation for all. I demand the
5 Water Rate Board adhere to these goals by
6 actually putting in demands as listed by the
7 Workers' Benefit Council.

8 One, Philadelphia Water Department
9 imposed no water rate increase. Two, that
10 the Philadelphia Water Department impose a
11 year-round moratorium on water shut offs for
12 any household at or below 300 percent of the
13 federal poverty level. That -- number three,
14 that the Philadelphia Water Department
15 reconnect any households at or below 300
16 percent of the federal poverty level, which
17 has been disconnected, establishing a
18 reasonable payment plan and charging no
19 connection fees.

20 That the Philadelphia Water
21 Department apply these same provisions for
22 any household above 300 percent of the
23 federal poverty level, which has suffered
24 financial hardship owing to ill health, job

1 loss, foreclosure or other economic hardship.

2 And number five, that the city of
3 Philadelphia and any practice of seizure or
4 foreclosure of residences as a means of false
5 payment of arrears of water bills. And
6 that's all I had. Thank you so much for
7 taking time to be here tonight to, you know,
8 explain yourselves to us, and thank you for
9 allowing me to share.

10 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Thank you very
11 much. Appreciate your testimony. Appreciate
12 all you folks coming out to -- the next
13 speaker I have on my list is Judith
14 Sussholtz?

15 MS. SUSSHOLTZ: That's correct.

16 CHAIR POPOWSKY: And Ms. Sussholtz,
17 would you please spell your -- state and
18 spell your name for us?

19 MS. SUSSHOLTZ: Sussholtz, you got
20 it right. Congratulations. S-U-S-S-H-O-L-T-
21 Z.

22 CHAIR POPOWSKY: And your first
23 name is Judith, J-U-D-I-T-H?

24 MS. SUSSHOLTZ: Correct.

1 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Are you speaking
2 on the other -- on your own behalf or on
3 behalf of any other organization?

4 MS. SUSSHOLTZ: I'm speaking on my
5 own behalf. I am a member of Eastern Service
6 Workers Association.

7 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Eastern Service
8 Workers Association?

9 MS. SUSSHOLTZ: But I'm speaking on
10 my own behalf as a senior citizen who is
11 junior at a very particular situation. I
12 have lived in Philadelphia and been a
13 customer of Philly Water utility since 1968.
14 But I was born in a place that many of you
15 would hear, from the Bronx. And that was my
16 first association with water, because Bronx
17 was served by what they call a reservoir. We
18 all knew that in the Bronx. And it was
19 delicious. I, I cannot recommend it
20 (indiscernible) that it was delicious.

21 I also have had the privilege of
22 being served the water which was the runoff
23 from the snowpack on the Chugach Mountains
24 outside of Anchorage, Alaska, drank it for

1 four years. It too was, in a different way,
2 delicious.

3 And Philadelphia is Denver. So I
4 have a background of water. I lived in the
5 Bronx, in the area called Highbridge.
6 Highbridge was the aqueduct. It's gulping
7 water directly into the Bronx to the
8 (indiscernible). Okay. That, that is my
9 savvy in water.

10 I am a teacher. I retired in 2017,
11 after 54 years of teaching in the public
12 schools of three states and one other
13 country. I was on a Fulbright Teacher
14 Exchange, where I served both the country and
15 the kids in (indiscernible). But I decided
16 in the middle of the '10s that I would not
17 choose to be working for money once I turned
18 80. So I retired at 79 in 2017. And I did
19 so after three years of keeping careful track
20 of my expenses. I was a single parent of two
21 sons. They are graduates of Central High
22 School. And I computed how much money I had
23 coming in. Social Security and a modest
24 pension, which is the only kind of pension

1 teachers have, modest. And thought, yes, I
2 can do this. I can finally stop working day
3 and night, literally. Tuesdays and Thursdays
4 I used to sit by my phone praying that it
5 would ring somewhere between 6:00 and 6:30,
6 so that I would be called to substitute for a
7 teacher at Martin Luther King Jr.
8 (indiscernible) High School, because somebody
9 was absent that night. And that would make
10 the difference between perhaps making use at
11 the end of the month and perhaps not.

12 For those three and a half hours
13 each night that I was called as a sub, I was
14 paid a magnificent sum of \$40 dollars and
15 change, three and a half hours for me to do
16 that. I'm teaching math too, because right
17 now I am tutoring second graders in math as a
18 volunteer at the Houston School, because I
19 didn't want to stop teaching. I just wanted
20 to stop having to work for money.

21 So I retired in 2017, and you all
22 know what happened in 2020 and persisted. By
23 the time we came out the other side of the
24 pandemic, I had lost the cushion of \$200 a

1 month that I had upon retirement. And I had
2 \$70 perhaps to play with at the end of each
3 month after my expected expenses. I do not
4 live exorbitantly. I have lived all my life
5 frugally of necessity, but also of choice
6 because I chose to put my money into other
7 places.

8 So \$70. And then less than a year
9 ago I was sitting (indiscernible) paying
10 bills at my kitchen table, and I became aware
11 that my heart was racing. And I took my
12 pulse and it was 140. My normal pulse was
13 62. I called a neighbor who got me into an
14 emergency room. By the time I got there it
15 was 150 and I was whisked back into a very
16 special room, and waiting for me there were
17 two cardiologists, three nurses, and two
18 students. This was it (indiscernible).

19 For the next five hours, they
20 worked very hard to get my pulse down from
21 150. During that five hours my heart stopped
22 twice and started up again at its own
23 volition. But they finally admitted me on
24 Tuesday night. That all happened on Monday

1 night. They admitted me at Tuesday midnight
2 and I spent three, three days at Penn while
3 they found the problem and scheduled me for a
4 procedure which I had in the following week,
5 and it took care of the problem. But it also
6 added to my basic 11 prescription medications
7 two more, which had a co-pay each of \$35.
8 And there went my \$70 claim money. And that
9 is where things stand right now.

10 \$120 is the water utility'
11 projection of the additional cost per year of
12 a typical customer. I don't have the \$120
13 any longer. I've got \$5 a month and \$60 a
14 year, if nothing else goes wrong. And I
15 can't count on that because now I'm 86. I'm
16 glad to be here, glad to be 86, glad to be
17 walking even though I started this a month
18 ago. And the water utility doesn't know
19 about me, now y'all perhaps, and all those
20 like me who are on very fixed incomes.

21 I will not tell you how much money
22 I have lost from my 401(k). It isn't a lot
23 of money in terms of maintaining me until I'm
24 103, but I don't expect to live until 103. I

1 would like to live without going into debt.
2 The institution of even this seemingly small
3 amount for a year, \$120 would put me in debt.
4 I don't have it and I don't have any more
5 coming in because everything is fixed.

6 So that is my situation and the
7 situation of very many other people like me.
8 Thank you.

9 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Thank you very
10 much. It was very, very (indiscernible) for
11 us to hear that. And I won't say good news,
12 but the news I have for you is that we have
13 folks here from the Water Department who can
14 tell you, if you don't already know, they do
15 have a senior discount rate. They do have a
16 premier in the nation cut -- tackle water
17 rates -- (indiscernible) rate program called
18 the Tiered Assistance Program. And I really
19 would ask, if, if you don't mind, to, to
20 speak to one of the folks here from the Water
21 Department, to get that information, make
22 sure that you have access to all of the
23 programs that are available for, for folks in
24 your situation.

1 None of us think that \$120 is a
2 small amount. We understand the importance
3 of that to all customers, and particularly in
4 your situation, there are -- there is help
5 available, and I would ask you to get the --
6 you know, get contact information from these
7 folks here in the front row so that they can
8 make sure that you have the information that
9 you need as best as possible.

10 MS. SUSSHOLTZ: Thank you. So
11 that, that also needs to be serviced?

12 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Oh, absolutely.
13 And I'll ask -- Mr. Dasent (indiscernible) --

14 MR. DASENT: Yeah.

15 CHAIR POPOWSKY: -- but --

16 MR. DASENT: Yeah.

17 CHAIR POPOWSKY: -- you can get the
18 contact information from him.

19 MR. DASENT: Yeah. Just for the
20 record, anyone who's interested in following
21 up, if you don't have -- if you need
22 information about a billing problem, reach
23 out to the WRB folks in the room. And also
24 share my email account. If you want to reach

1 out to me directly with any questions, you
2 shoot it to me on my email. I can respond to
3 you or put you in touch with the, the folks
4 at the Water Department that can help. Okay?

5 MS. MCCARTHY: There are folks at
6 the table where you came in that can help
7 you, and the, the woman in the back as well.

8 MR. DASENT: Okay. Let me walk
9 back with you, so (indiscernible).

10 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Thank you very
11 much. And then the next person I have is
12 Jillian Tadrzynski.

13 MS. TADRZYNSKI: Yes.

14 CHAIR POPOWSKY: I want you to ask
15 to first state --

16 MS. TADRZYNSKI: Yeah.

17 CHAIR POPOWSKY: -- pronounce your
18 name --

19 MS. TADRZYNSKI: Of course.

20 CHAIR POPOWSKY: -- and spell it
21 for us, and spell (indiscernible) -- you can
22 go ahead.

23 MS. TADRZYNSKI: Yes. So my name
24 is Jillian Tadrzynski. For the stenographer,

1 the last name is T as in Thomas, A as in
2 Adam, D as in David, R as in Robert, Z as in
3 Zebra, Y as in yes, N as in Nancy, S as in
4 sky, K as in kilogram, I as in icicle. And
5 my first name is Jillian, J-I-L-L-I-A-N. And
6 if at anytime I do speak too quickly for you,
7 please slow me down. I get yelled at by
8 stenographers all day at my job.

9 CHAIR POPOWSKY: (indiscernible).

10 MS. TADRZYNSKI: Yes, I am. And
11 I'm here on behalf of myself and as well as a
12 volunteer of the Eastern Service Workers
13 Association.

14 CHAIR POPOWSKY: This is Eastern
15 Service Workers Association?

16 MS. TADRZYNSKI: Yes.

17 CHAIR POPOWSKY: ESWA? Okay, thank
18 you.

19 MS. TADRZYNSKI: Yes. So first,
20 I'd like to start with a little trivia for
21 the members of the Board and the Water
22 Department. Do you know what city in the
23 world has been ranked with the best drinking
24 water?

1 MR. LONG: New York.

2 MS. TADRZYNSKI: No, it's Glasgow
3 in Scotland. Do you know --

4 MS. MCCARTHY: Well, I'll tell you
5 that that's a very subjective. Very, very
6 subjective. So I --

7 MS. TADRZYNSKI: Statistically, it
8 is ranked as the best. Do you know --

9 MS. MCCARTHY: Well, I don't know
10 what the standards are there, so --

11 MS. TADRZYNSKI: Do you know why
12 their water is ranked as clean and as healthy
13 as it is? Because their system, the global
14 water system, was based off of the fair
15 amount of water works in Philadelphia. As
16 Mr. Long stated, we should have the best
17 water infrastructure not just in the country,
18 in the world. Cities that waste their water
19 off of our water systems 100-plus years ago
20 now far outstrip us with equality and
21 availability of their water. Let me tell you
22 something else about the Glasgow water
23 system. Their rates are capped at 40 pounds
24 a month for pretty much everyone in the city.

1 That's the equivalent of about \$60 depending
2 on how the conversion rate goes, because the
3 value of the dollar is everywhere right now.

4 So why can a city that was based
5 off of all water systems a hundred years ago
6 provide better water more fairly, more
7 equitably, more routinely at a cheaper price.
8 And then you come in here, the Philadelphia
9 Water Department is coming in here asking for
10 an 18.5 percent increase over the next two
11 years. I did the math. It's an 18-and-a-
12 half percent increase over the next two
13 years.

14 One of the reasons being to account
15 for infrastructure, which, again, as you
16 heard Mr. Long say, he's not even associated
17 with ESWA. The water infrastructure in the
18 City is senseless. It doesn't work for the
19 people. We aren't getting the water that we
20 are paying for. In addition, one of the
21 reasons that was listed on the sheet that the
22 wonderful ladies in the back gave me when I
23 came in the first time was that the staff and
24 benefits costs were increasing due to labor

1 negotiations.

2 Now, let me explain something. As
3 another underpaid member who works for the
4 city of Philadelphia, we got a cost of living
5 adjustment to our salaries effective last
6 July, that was 4 percent. And then the City
7 accidentally overpaid us a few pennies, and
8 they brought that back from our paychecks in
9 the next pay period.

10 So why does a 4 percent cost of
11 living increase for employees mean that you
12 now have to raise the rates of everyone in
13 the City 18 and a half percent. The math
14 does not math. It simply doesn't. I also
15 want to point out, and I'm sure that Mr.
16 Abrams is aware of this, that the five deputy
17 commissioners have an average salary of
18 \$181,948. That's the five deputy
19 commissioners listed on the website.

20 But again, the average starting
21 salary for a technician in the Water
22 Department is \$16.83 an hour. You can go and
23 get a job at McDonald's for almost as much as
24 that. And yes, McDonald's and all these

1 other places that are paying \$15 are
2 important jobs. The people who are working
3 at the Water Department getting paid \$16.83
4 an hour are important jobs, but that does not
5 leave them the money to, to actually buy the
6 water that they are working to make sure it
7 is flowing for the City, if it is flowing for
8 the City.

9 Now, one of the things as well is
10 that I have seen my own water bill
11 increasing. I have lived in the city of
12 Philadelphia as an adult for the last 10
13 years, almost 11 years. I came as a student
14 to Temple. I stayed on for law school. I
15 have stayed in the City because I love this
16 City. This City is my home as much as an
17 American city can be my home. And yet I'm
18 struggling as a -- as a City employee.

19 I have two roommates. I turned 29.
20 A generation ago, I would have been living on
21 my own for the last five years, not even a
22 care for this. And yet salaries are not
23 going up. I have to live with two other
24 people. And I'm sure that Mr. Patel can tell

1 you how much law school cost. I have student
2 loans. I cannot afford this type of almost
3 20 percent increase over the next two years,
4 when my landlord's not helping with the
5 water, my landlord's not helping with any of
6 the other bills. I have to pay my landlord's
7 taxes and all, that's part of my rent. I
8 have to pay that, on top of all my other
9 utilities, on top of my student loans. And
10 the only reason why I'm keeping my job as a
11 City employee, even though I am desperately
12 underpaid, is because of the health care
13 program. Because the City thankfully
14 provides health care benefits.

15 I'm a very sick individual. I need
16 those health care benefits. I still have to
17 pay hundreds of dollars out-of-pocket. My
18 options at this point are to die but go
19 without water, because that is where I'm at.
20 I can sit at home with a migraine. I can sit
21 at home wondering if I'll be able to afford
22 the surgery to remove brain tumors or whether
23 I can get drinking water. I mean, at this
24 point, I don't know what the better option is

1 because the City has shown that it does not
2 care about its citizens, and allowing a rate
3 increase of 18.5 percent over the next two
4 years just hammers that message home even
5 more. Thank you.

6 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Thank you very
7 much. And let me just again say -- and I
8 certainly appreciate your testimony -- the
9 Water Department, perhaps you know, perhaps
10 you don't, has programs that are designed to
11 assist folks who are below a certain poverty
12 level, but also folks who are suffering from
13 hardships. It's important you know that
14 there are people with certain hardships.
15 They can also --

16 MS. TADRZYNSKI: Sir, I understand
17 that. However, I don't qualify because I
18 have roommates. I have gone through the
19 application process. And because technically
20 it is paid through my landlord and we pay our
21 landlord for it, I don't qualify. There's no
22 way for me to get this relief because of how
23 I have to pay my water bill.

24 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Well, let me, in

1 that case, ask that you do contact folks
2 here, the public advocate and the social
3 department, see if there is a way to get
4 assistance from them. I certainly appreciate
5 your testimony, and I'm sure it represents
6 feelings of many folks. Thank you very much.

7 The next -- the next person I have
8 here is MacAllister Gartner. Please start
9 just by stating and spelling your name.

10 MR. GARTNER: Absolutely. My name
11 is McAllister Gartner. It's spelled M-A-C,
12 capital A, L-L-I-S-T-E-R G-A-R-T-N-E-R.

13 CHAIR POPOWSKY: And you work for
14 the (indiscernible) water service?

15 MR. GARTNER: I do not pay my water
16 bill directly. I pay through utility
17 overages through my apartment complex that I
18 live in.

19 CHAIR POPOWSKY: That's okay. And
20 are you representing yourself? I see you
21 have (indiscernible).

22 MR. GARTNER: I am representing
23 myself and I'm also on behalf of the Workers'
24 Benefit Council.

1 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Oh, okay.

2 Worker's Benefit Council. Go ahead.

3 MR. GARTNER: About eight months
4 ago, I moved to Philadelphia with the hopes
5 of building a future for myself in a place
6 that I could both afford and had an active
7 economy for young professionals and people
8 who desired to be involved in their
9 communities. Affording Philadelphia,
10 however, has proven to be a series of hurdles
11 and obstacles that are often becoming not
12 just an issue for me and other young people
13 new to this City, but much worse for some of
14 the longest time residents who work in the
15 low-paying sectors of the economy here.

16 The Philadelphia Water Department
17 has proposed a rate increase of \$221 million,
18 or an increase of roughly 18 percent of its
19 previous existing rate. I personally do not
20 pay my water bill directly, but I do pay it
21 indirectly through the utility overage
22 program allotted by my apartment in which I
23 rent a single room. I am often paying \$120
24 to \$160 in utilities every month on top of

1 the rent which I barely make because
2 Philadelphia is a poor job market for
3 students and young adults looking to get by,
4 let alone professionals and homemakers.

5 I know the water rate hike will
6 make my bills go up every month and most
7 definitely will be much worse for many of my
8 friends throughout the City who live in
9 apartments or houses in which they rent with
10 several roommates just to make their rent.
11 Many of them, I can attest personally, have
12 already fallen behind on gas and water bills
13 and some of them even have dealt with shut
14 offs. The City has rolled out many programs
15 to assist people under a certain income
16 bracket in households with children or
17 seniors. However, one has to ask, what about
18 the at least 4,500 Philadelphians who do not
19 fall into these program allowances, who are
20 already at risk of having their water shut
21 off?

22 Just yesterday, I was helping
23 advocate for a woman who happened to work for
24 PICO, who herself could not afford her own

1 water or gas bill because she's already
2 struggling to pay for the medical care for
3 her child who has an autoimmune disease. She
4 said that to focus on paying for the life-
5 savings care for her child forces her to put
6 other bills on the background.

7 This member also deemed to -- was
8 deemed to make too much to qualify for the
9 bills -- for the assistance from the City
10 which has resulted in her falling \$600 behind
11 on her water bill and cannot pay -- afford to
12 pay any more than that. We are forced to
13 become poorer to get the assistance or we are
14 denied entirely because we are not poor
15 enough and yet, you know, just leaving many
16 of us to scrape by barely. We need policies
17 that benefit all of us and not some that are
18 just robbing Peter to pay Paul.

19 Without water in your home, you do
20 not have a toilet. Human waste builds up and
21 the plumbing will become damaged from a lack
22 of proper maintenance. Without water in a
23 home, drinking water becomes an additional
24 expense a person or family has to keep up

1 with, quite literally being essential to
2 living. Without water in a home, a person
3 cannot afford to bathe or shower in which
4 they'll be publicly scrutinized -- I've seen
5 many people myself -- or, you know, could
6 even lose access to their jobs because they
7 smell poor and the work that they need to
8 survive is taken from them because they
9 cannot shower.

10 One without water, cannot cook or
11 do their dishes. Without water, a person
12 can't wash their hands after handling
13 everyday biohazards, and disease and public
14 safety issues follow. Without running water,
15 a person is without one of the most
16 fundamental aspects of modern infrastructure,
17 the thing that makes everything possible.
18 They are without something that a lot of
19 people consider a fundamental human right.
20 Water is life.

21 To increase the water rate in this
22 city from what it already is is to endanger
23 the lives and livelihoods of some of its most
24 essential workers, infrastructural,

1 significant ties of community, and backbones
2 of this country. Water is essential and it
3 is not for those with to demand unsustainable
4 stuns from those who are without.

5 By September of 2015, 10 whole
6 years ago, the 193 members of the United
7 Nations General Assembly, including the
8 United States, unanimously agreed to endorse
9 the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and to
10 work tirelessly to implement them. Goal
11 number 6 is to ensure availability and
12 sustainable management of water and
13 sanitation for all.

14 I demand the Water Rate Board
15 adhere to these goals by actually putting the
16 demands as listed by the Workers' Benefit
17 Council. One, that the Philadelphia Water
18 Department impose no water rate increase.
19 Two, that the Philadelphia Water Department
20 impose a year-round moratorium on water shut
21 offs for any household at or below 300
22 percent of the federal poverty level.

23 Three, that the Philadelphia Water
24 Department reconnect any household at or

1 below 300 percent of the federal poverty
2 level which has been disconnected,
3 establishing a reasonable payment plan and
4 charging no reconnection fees. Four, the
5 Philadelphia Water Department apply these
6 same provisions for any household above 300
7 percent of the federal poverty level which
8 has been -- which has suffered financial
9 hardship owing to ill health, job loss,
10 foreclosure, or other economic hardship.

11 And five, the city of Philadelphia
12 end any practice of seizure or foreclosure of
13 residences as a mean to force payment of
14 arrears on water bills. Water is life.
15 Thank you.

16 MS. MCCARTHY: Can I ask you, the
17 customer that has the water bill with the --
18 I think you said \$600 with the child, there -
19 - there's, there's a special hardship portion
20 of the TAP R. It sounds like that she could
21 qualify.

22 MR. GARTNER: As far as I'm aware,
23 she's applied several times and they've been
24 denying her every time for her income.

1 MS. MCCARTHY: Well, special
2 hardships not employment?

3 MR. ABRAMS: No, there's no income
4 limit for a special hardship. So I think
5 that's in terms of the -- I mean, that -- I
6 mean, someone from the Water Revenue Bureau
7 can address that, but the program is set up
8 that there is no income limit. It's really
9 looking at the expenses and, and then making
10 the termination from there.

11 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Thank you. Glen,
12 could you please state your name again so
13 that (indiscernible).

14 MR. ABRAMS: Sure. That's Glen, G-
15 L-E-N, Abrams, A-B-R-A-M-S.

16 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Thank you very
17 much. Appreciate you.

18 MR. GARTNER: I appreciate you.

19 MS. MCCARTHY: Thank you.

20 MR. ABRAMS: MacAllister Gartner.

21 CHAIR POPOWSKY: And the next
22 person I have is Antonia Batts?

23 MS. BATTIS: Antonia Batts?

24 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Yes. Yes, ma'am.

1 MS. BATTS: Good evening, everyone.

2 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Good evening.

3 State your name and spell it for us?

4 MS. BATTS: Yes. My name is

5 Antonia Batts, B-A-T-T-S. I am a veteran of

6 the United States Armed Forces. I have been

7 -- I have returned to Philadelphia a little

8 more than a couple of decades ago.

9 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Ma'am, just a
10 minute.

11 MS. BATTS: Yes.

12 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Are you a customer
13 of the Water Department?

14 MS. BATTS: I'm a member of ESWA.
15 Is that what you're asking?

16 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Well, no. Well --

17 MS. MCCARTHY: Do you live in
18 Philadelphia? Are you a water customer?

19 MS. BATTS: Oh, no, I'm not
20 actually a water customer. Unfortunately, I
21 was subjected to residing in public housing
22 just to raise a child in a single room since
23 I returned with my child as an infant from
24 South Carolina. And one of my biggest

1 concerns were if I ever had the opportunity
2 to receive the proper income by merit, would
3 I be able to afford to live in my own place,
4 which has been pretty much my dream, which
5 has been taking so long.

6 And I will say this. I will have
7 to base that dream on, first, the proper
8 income as a result of the proper job which
9 I've worked often in my many years. But
10 we'll see what happens. But I, I have --
11 two, there's a challenge to think about when
12 I do my personal annual breakdown of an
13 expense sheet, which would include public
14 house mortgage and of course, utilities, of
15 course including water, would I be able to
16 afford it?

17 I would love to remain in
18 Philadelphia area because I was born and
19 raised here, to tell you the truth, as well
20 as my parents. And I will say, coming from
21 the West Philadelphia area as a child, I've
22 seen some things on the way coming and going.
23 And I would really appreciate being able to
24 remain here in Philadelphia as well as my,

1 you know, family unit and generations to
2 come, if I can obtain a home and be able to
3 afford to maintain it.

4 So of course, utilities will be one
5 of the, the biggest expenses to consider.
6 And I, I just received a councilman's, you
7 know -- not what they call it -- but, you
8 know, congratulations sheet of Mr. Young
9 about -- on being a participant as a veteran
10 in various things. And I -- since I returned
11 to Philadelphia, I volunteered in at least
12 seven different (indiscernible) a matter of
13 years and I'm retired.

14 But I will say, if I can support my
15 community, I would pray that I can support my
16 ability to live peacefully and not worry
17 about where my next bill will come from, just
18 to maintain a little humble boom to tell you
19 the truth. And I don't know much else to
20 say. Yes, I have been a member of the ESWA
21 when I could be, and I don't know what else
22 to say tell you. So thank you very much and
23 I appreciate you hearing me. Thank you very
24 much.

1 CHAIR POPOWSKY: (indiscernible).
2 So, you do have an opportunity,
3 (indiscernible) discuss with folks here from
4 the Water Department, programs that might be
5 available to help you on your -- on your own.
6 Please, please do that.

7 MS. BATTS: Thank you. And who
8 would I address about that? You?

9 MR. DASENT: Yeah. Meet the guy.

10 MS. BATTS: Okay.

11 MR. DASENT: I'll come back and
12 talk to you right now.

13 MS. BATTS: Thank you very much. I
14 appreciate it. As a coincidence, I was a
15 member of water borne -- let's just say
16 branch of the service, which is the Navy, so
17 you know I enjoy having water around. Have a
18 good day.

19 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Thank you very
20 much.

21 MS. MCCARTHY: Thank you.

22 MS. BATTS: Thank you.

23 CHAIR POPOWSKY: I have one more
24 person on the list, but, but, but, but, but

1 speaking so we have time for that. But the
2 last person I have on the list right now is
3 Thomas Skokan?

4 MR. SKOKAN: Yeah. Mine has got to
5 be deep because --

6 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Please, please
7 hold on a minute. See, you have to state
8 your name and spell it ---

9 MR. SKOKAN: My name is Thomas
10 Skokan. I'm a Philadelphia resident for my
11 entire life, 66 years.

12 CHAIR POPOWSKY: And spell it,
13 please? (indiscernible).

14 MR. SKOKAN: S-K-O-K-A-N.

15 CHAIR POPOWSKY: And you're here on
16 behalf of --

17 MR. SKOKAN: I'd be here on my own
18 behalf, but I also I'm a member of Eastern
19 Service, but I'm in the northeast and I have
20 a pretty unique situation. And just a quick,
21 quick little story that I'm curious why
22 things go the way they do.

23 You had a massive project in the
24 last few years, okay? You were tearing the

1 streets up, putting storm drains in, and so
2 far it doesn't look like it's working very
3 well.

4 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Can you tell us
5 where that is?

6 MR. SKOKAN: And, and --

7 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Can you tell us
8 where that is? I'm sorry.

9 MR. SKOKAN: Yes. It's Holmesburg
10 -- Lower Holmesburg, Mayfair. It's been
11 going on for several years. It's disrupted
12 the hell out of people's lives. It's created
13 extra traffic problems. People don't know
14 where to park. They pull out and they have
15 accidents. And --

16 MS. MCCARTHY: Do, do you have any
17 street -- the specific --

18 MR. SKOKAN: My street that I live
19 on is Cottage Street --

20 MS. MCCARTHY: Cottage --

21 MR. SKOKAN: -- 7500
22 (indiscernible).

23 MS. MCCARTHY: Seven five? Thank
24 you.

1 MR. SKOKAN: Yes. But it's all
2 around. It's Walker Street, it's Jackson
3 Street. It's many adjacent streets. And I
4 know about soil percolation, I know about
5 drainage. I know about all that stuff for
6 many years. And I let my little side yard
7 become a forest. There are trees up above
8 the roof line. And there are -- the soil
9 absorption of my property is one of the
10 highest you're going to find on your list.
11 And we had the soil perc guys come and drill
12 four-inch holes and they left them wide open
13 for kids to get their bikes in, old people to
14 get their canes stuck in.

15 But I went over to one and I said,
16 "Sir, I guess I'm not on your list to do any
17 of this because my drainage is excellent,
18 right?" He said, "Yeah, you have, like,
19 among the best drainage of everything we've
20 seen. We don't even put a -- we didn't even
21 drill a hole near your place, because we know
22 the drainage, you're sucking up the water,
23 there's no runoff."

24 So my question to him and to you

1 is, doesn't -- so, sir, not you. I mean, I'm
2 talking -- when I talk to the man. Sir, you
3 mean if other people did what I did with this
4 property, you wouldn't need these massive
5 projects and these many, many, many thousands
6 of dollars, because this, this works and it's
7 cheap and it's beautiful. And all the trees
8 now are beautiful. They're coming into
9 magnificence. They just have their leaves
10 out.

11 And we need more of those kind of
12 things than these massive perc barrel, public
13 works projects. And, you know -- and I had
14 to live through this the last four or five
15 years. And the other thing is, why is there
16 a minimum? There -- a lot of older people
17 don't even use their minimum water, but
18 they're charged for it. And, and if your
19 meter isn't -- doesn't use a certain amount,
20 you're considered that you have no usage,
21 even when you have usage. And I went through
22 that also.

23 So, I mean, you know, I'm trying to
24 speak from another perspective of nature and

1 of something that, you know, should be looked
2 at and should have been discussed before
3 these massive projects were, were budgeted
4 out.

5 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Thank you. And
6 I'm sure the department will respond because
7 the issue you raise is, is very important.
8 It, it certainly --

9 MR. SKOKAN: I tried to cooperate
10 with the rainwater situation, but I don't
11 know, you guys kind of abandoned that route.

12 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Anyway, I'll ask
13 (indiscernible) --

14 MR. SKOKAN: Yeah. All right.

15 CHAIR POPOWSKY: -- to, to speak to
16 that. But that's a really --

17 MR. SKOKAN: All right. Thank you,
18 sir.

19 CHAIR POPOWSKY: -- a really
20 important mission for the city of
21 Philadelphia, as you know.

22 MR. SKOKAN: Right.

23 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Thank you.

24 MR. SKOKAN: You're welcome.

1 MR. ABRAMS: We're happy to reach
2 out to this gentleman to, to follow up with
3 some, some technical response. Because I
4 think some of this is -- well, we, we need to
5 consider rate design changes, storm water
6 rate design. Their different properties have
7 different usages, runoffs is different. And
8 so we can look at that.

9 And there are other things that we
10 need to examine to make sure we have a fair
11 system for everyone, not, not just the larger
12 users, but some of the smaller users as well.
13 And so let me talk with you and share some
14 information and at least tell you where we
15 are and perhaps learn something from your
16 experience. Thank you.

17 MR. SKOKAN: Thank you.

18 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Is there anyone
19 who wants to come up and speak? And you
20 don't have to speak publicly if you don't
21 want. You can speak privately with the folks
22 who are here from the Water Department or the
23 public advocate. Does anyone else want to
24 (indiscernible). And could I just ask

1 somebody to, to spell out ESWA for us, the,
2 the full name again?

3 MR. LONG: Eastern Service Workers
4 Association.

5 CHAIR POPOWSKY: Thank you.
6 (indiscernible). And those are from the
7 Workers' Benefits Council, WBC. Thank you
8 very much. This has been a very enlightening
9 hearing. I really appreciate -- we really
10 appreciate you coming out tonight. Please
11 take advantage that this was one of the
12 habits. You have some folks here from the
13 Water Department, they can answer hopefully
14 some more questions if you'd like to discuss
15 (indiscernible). And we'll stay here for a
16 while longer. But if there are no other
17 public comments, I'd like to close this
18 hearing. And thank you all again for coming.
19 I hope to see you next week. Thank you.

20 (Proceeding concluded at 7:08 p.m.)

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1 CERTIFICATE OF DIGITAL REPORTER

2

3 I, HEIDI SCHOENTUBE, a Digital Reporter for
4 the State of Philadelphia, do hereby certify:

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6 That the foregoing proceeding hereinbefore
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10 I further certify that I am not related to
11 any of the parties to this action by blood or
12 marriage, and that I am in no way interested in
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15 IN WITNESS THEREOF, I have hereunto set my
16 hand this 23rd day of April, 2025.

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Heidi Schoentube
Digital Reporter
CER-1677

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