

RESOLUTION CALLING FOR THE EXTENSION OF THE MORATORIUM ON WATER SHUT OFFS IN THE CITY OF DETROIT

By Council Member Coleman Young II

WHEREAS, The issue of mass water shut offs against low-income Detroit residents has been publicly debated, in the face of repeated calls for a water affordability program in the form of an income-based rate structure, for over 16 years.

WHEREAS The Detroit City Council's resolution passed in May 2015 called for such a water affordability program to end unjust, unhealthy, and ill-advised violations of the human rights of people who are unable to pay the full rate for safe drinking water because of their economic condition, a demand City council has been making since 2005. However, until the covid pandemic of 2020, neither the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) nor the Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) had ended such residential shut offs that are the result of financial hardship.

WHEREAS, Nationally, before the pandemic, one out of every twenty households had water turned off at some point for nonpayment, amounting to approximately fifteen million people, while during the pandemic, over nine thousand people have died as a result of water shut offs.

WHEREAS, The Federal government currently actively prevents gas and electric shutoffs, of low-income Americans through the Low-Income Heating Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The LIHEAP program receives and expends approximately \$3.5 billion annually to support the gas and electric heating utility costs for low-income residents throughout the United States. Based on the same realities that led the federal government to recognize the need to support low-income families by subsidizing energy, it is time to also provide a robust federal subsidy for the precious resource of clear and safe engineered drinking water.

WHEREAS, Potential and actual serious health effects of these water shut offs may include epidemics of water borne diseases infant malnutrition because of inability to prepare, baby formula, inability of diabetics to prepare meals essential to maintaining health, chronic urinary tract infections, upper respiratory infections, eczema and other skin conditions and other diseases, including but not limited to flus and viruses such as Covid 19 that can best be avoided by frequent hand washing. The connection between the ready availability of clean water and health is well established.

WHEREAS Researchers conducting a study of psychological distress related to water insecurity across the city found that lack of water significantly impacts one's mental health and level of distress; even the fear of having water shut off increases tress. In addition, many parents are reluctant to seek government help and remain silent regarding lack of water service in their households because they live in fear that their children will be taken from them.

WHEREAS, In response to the coronavirus pandemic, March 9, 2020, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer and Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan announced a statewide moratorium on water

shutoffs and a new Water Restart Plan in Detroit to restore water to those who were living without service. Under the agreement, the State of Michigan covered the first thirty days of cost, after which the resident is required to pay twenty-five dollars per month to have the service extended.

WHEREAS, The City of Detroit began restoring water to affected homes in preparation for the pandemic. It appears that in the face of Covid 19 the City of Detroit is now officially treating water shutoffs as a public health crisis worthy of intervention. Coronavirus may have been what pushed the city over the edge, but the need for an income-based program to benefit low-income residents has been a subject of discussion by government and community leaders for years. This new interest may be due to a raise in consciousness regarding race, inequality, water infrastructure, and public health.

WHEREAS, The State of Michigan's moratorium on water shut offs expired in March of 2021. However, according to the Director of DWSD, the city has set aside sufficient state, federal, private, and local funds to continue the moratorium on water service interruptions even after the state health department's orders have ended. As a result, the City of Detroit through Mayor Mike Duggan, announced the moratorium on shut offs will extend through 2022. The mayor has stated that his goal is to "stop water shutoffs to low-income Detroiters once and for all." According to the Mayor, the city has secured the funding necessary to continue this effort through 2022 and is building a coalition to make the ban on water shut offs permanent.

WHEREAS, The need for a subsidy to support long term sustainable and affordable access to water and sewerage service for the benefit of low-income residential customers will not end after the Covid 19 pandemic is better controlled, providing an opportunity to implement new policies going forward whether these policies or initiatives be in the form of an income based rate scaled affordability program, a federally sponsored program targeted toward low income residents recognizing that access to affordable water as it is essential for sustaining life, no different than gas and electric heat, a program that eliminates water bills for certain lower income families, altogether, or a mixture of these and other reasonable policy changes. **THEREFORE, BE IT**

RESOLVED The Detroit City Council strongly urge DWSD and Mayor Duggan to extend its current moratorium on water shutoffs and continue to prohibit residential water interruptions unless and until DWSD, GLWA and/or the Federal Government develops and implements a Water Affordability Program, which prevents shutting off water to residents who cannot afford to pay for the full billed rates. **BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED That copies of this resolution shall be provided to Mayor Mike Duggan, Governor Gretchen Whitmer, County Executives David Coulter, Warren Evans and Mark Hackel, Oakland and Macomb County water resources executive officials Jim Nash and Candace Miller, the boards of DWSD and GLWA, media representatives, consumers and affordable water advocates.