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Senate of Pennsylvania

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August 24, 2020

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
400 North Street, Third Floor
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

In Re: Docket No. R-2020-3019369
Docket No. R-2020-3019371

Dear Administrative Law Judge Johnson,

I write to oppose the rate increases proposed by the Pennsylvania-American Water Company (PAWC) and PAWC's Wastewater Division (PAWC-WD) for water and wastewater services to approximately 2.4 million residential, commercial, and industrial customers across Pennsylvania.

While I would strenuously object to raising rates for the average customer nearly 20% over the course of two years in ordinary times, Allegheny County residents are not living in ordinary times. In June 2020, the most recent month that we have data for, Allegheny County had a 12.6% unemployment rate, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics. That is more than twice the unemployment rate in February 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Simply put, this is not the time to ask residents to pay such an enormous hike in essential utilities such as water and sewage. This rate increase will disproportionately affect low-, moderate-, and fixed-income households, the very households that are, through no fault of their own, disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, our businesses have sustained closures, reductions in capacity, and other operating restraints as we work to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. In these rapidly changing times, we simply cannot ask our businesses, particularly our small businesses, to shoulder this rate increase.

I also feel compelled to raise concerns that this will be the second rate increase that PAWC has pursued in the past 2 years. In 2018, PAWC increased their average rates 9.4%, following the settlement of a previous rate increase request case. As part of this settlement, PAWC agreed not to file a general rate increase prior to March 31, 2020. I cannot help but notice that these rate cases at issue here were filed on March 30, 2020 and March 31, 2020, indicating that PAWC is seeking to raise rates as soon as legally permitted. If PAWC were granted its proposed rate increase in this case, residents across Pennsylvania would see their water and sewage bills increase nearly 30% in just 4 years.

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AUG 24 2020


PA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION
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Page 2

August 24, 2020

While I understand the importance of infrastructure upgrades and maintenance needed to maintain the safety of our water supplies and environment, I cannot support this significant rate hike on residents during a time when so many are being asked to sacrifice to keep our communities safe from COVID-19. We cannot make it more difficult for our families to afford water during a global health emergency.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lindsey M. Williams".

Lindsey M. Williams
38th Senatorial District