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House of Representatives
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R-2021-3024774

R-2021-3024779

June 29, 2021

Dear Mr. Pickering,

First, thank for your leadership in hosting a public comment period that allows stakeholders to give input on the proposed rate increases and a new stormwater fee the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority is considering. I applaud the advances Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority has made replacing lead service lines and investing in green stormwater infrastructure across our communities. I know these bear a significant cost. As a legislator responsible in part for the state budget, I understand budget decisions are difficult. As stewards of public resources, I believe that we have a duty to craft a balanced and well-reasoned budget, but also one that considers the current economic climate and the realities facing the most vulnerable individuals in our constituency.

As PWSA faces this daunting task, I ask that you consider the burden your proposal bears on working families, as well as seniors and individuals with disabilities with fixed incomes. Data illustrates that these wages and Social Security have not kept pace with the rising costs of living, including utility prices. Under our proposed rate increases for drinking and wastewater by 2023, the average residential PWSA customer will be charged about \$1,092.60/year, up from the average of about \$478.80/year in 2016. An increase of 130% in water bills over a 5-year period is not realistic, especially coming on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic and recession, which disproportionately impacted low-wage workers and communities of color across PWSA's service area. Current PWSA assistance programs are not sufficient to help families in the hardest hit industry sectors struggling to keep a roof over their head, food on the table, and utilities running. stay connected and are woefully insufficient to help our communities through the proposed rate increase.

As a representative for an area with significant flooding issues, I commend PWSA for adopting a stormwater fee to improve stormwater management in your service area. I agree that a fee based on square footage of impervious area is a more equitable way to share the burden of costs associated with managing stormwater. Using that lens of equity, I encourage PWSA's leadership to exempt low-income residents from the fee and require businesses with low water usage, but large parking lots to pay their fair share. In addition, I encourage that these dollars are used to build community-driven green infrastructure projects, fund additional low-income programs, and build a robust educational outreach initiative to educate households of the increase and how the monies will be invested to the broader community benefit.

We must ensure that water and wastewater services be available and affordable for all our neighbors. As PWSA navigates difficult circumstances, we must all be realistic about what burden our communities are able to shoulder.

Thank you for seeking public input on the proposed rate increases. I look forward to seeing how this input evolves your proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara Innamorato', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sara Innamorato
State Representative
21st Legislative District

CC: Board of the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority
PWSA Executive Leadership Team