

MIKE CABELL, MEMBER
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COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
GAME & FISHERIES
HUMAN SERVICES
TRANSPORTATION

June 14, 2024

Re: Aqua Pennsylvania's proposed rate hike filed 5/23/24

To Commissioners of the Public Utility Commission:

I am writing today with great concern and on behalf of dozens of my constituents who have contacted me about Aqua Pennsylvania's recently filed request to significantly increase water rates.

According to Aqua's own numbers, the typical resident would pay 24 percent more if the company's entire request were to be approved. That would equate to more than \$225 annually.

I find the rate proposal to be unacceptable under any circumstance, but especially at a time when many of the people I represent are still coping with the inflationary spike that permanently raised the cost of groceries and many other necessities. Simply put, everyone from the top earners on down has been feeling the pinch of the post-COVID economy.

Aqua provides services to thousands of my constituents in Luzerne County, many of whom live in rural areas with few large employers. I also must point out that more than 20 percent of the county's population is ages 65 or older, Census data shows. And many of these folks are on limited incomes.

Every day, people come into my offices who are making \$20,000 or less annually and struggling to find ways to pay for their food and medication. That's why I believe adding an extra burden of a few hundred dollars every year is just too much for some to handle.

I would also like to specifically highlight the plight of Aqua customers who live in the Beech Mountain Lakes development in Butler Township. Residents there have previously contacted me about their sewer bills from Aqua, which are significantly higher than what customers pay who are on the township's separate public sewer system. Now, Aqua is proposing increased water fees at a time when many Beech Mountain homeowners are facing a potential special assessment, or one-time tax, to cover DEP-ordered remediation to the community's dam.

Needless to say, Beech Mountain residents are exasperated as they get hit with one hike after another. They have told me clearly: "Enough is enough."

My constituents also want to know how Aqua can justify such a hefty increase when it was granted permission by the PUC to raise water and wastewater rates just two years ago. The company points out its infrastructure investments as part of the notice it sent to residents, but some customers have argued they have seen no improvements of that type in the areas where they live.

As the PUC fully investigates this latest request, I would urge commissioners to demand the company provide details on every improvement or repair it has made since its last request was approved in 2022. This analysis should also include, if possible, an accurate and independently verified tally of the costs involved for the improvements.

I have encouraged my constituents and elected leaders in affected municipalities to write the PUC to state their objections and concerns so they can be part of the official record.

In the meantime, I want to state that I strongly oppose the rate increase until such time the company can definitively prove it needs the extra revenue to continue providing service and improving its distribution system and other infrastructure.

Thank you in advance for considering my input.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Cabell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

PA State Rep. Mike Cabell, 117th District