



October 30, 2023

The Honorable Patrick Stefano
Chair
Senate Consumer Protection &
Professional Licensure
Senate Box 203032
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3032

The Honorable Lisa Boscola
Chair
Senate Consumer Protection &
Professional Licensure
Senate Box 203018
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3018

RE: **Senate Bill 767 – Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program**

Dear Chairs:

The Pennsylvania-Section, American Water Works Association (PA-AWWA) consists of 2,500 + members representing all classes of water utilities in Pennsylvania, including those PUC regulated, authorities, and municipalities, plus regulators, vendors, contractors, engineers, and others dedicated to promoting the health and welfare of Pennsylvania by providing affordable drinking water of superior quality and sufficient quantity. The Water Utility Council of PA-AWWA (WUC) includes representatives from the National Association of Water Companies, Pennsylvania Chapter; Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Association; Pennsylvania Rural Water Association; and Water Works Operators' Association of Pennsylvania.

The **WUC supports Senate Bill 767**, which was referred to the Senate Consumer Protection & Professional Licensure Committee on June 14, 2023.

Senate Bill 767 (Boscola-D) amends the Human Services Code, in general powers and duties of the Department of Public Welfare, providing for Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program; and making an editorial change.

This legislation will establish the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program. The purpose of the program is to assist eligible individuals who are water or wastewater system customers, or both, in this Commonwealth, with overdue water or wastewater system bills, upon the termination of the temporary Federal Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP).

Similar in scope and origin to the long-standing LIHEAP (Low Income Heating and Energy Assistance Program), the **federal LIHWAP program** utilized American Rescue Plan dollars to assist states in supporting low-income households during the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. States who received LIHEAP grants in fiscal year 2021 were eligible to receive funding for **LIHWAP** in 2022. Administered by the Department of Human Services (DHS) with

the support of the Federal Government, the \$43.2 million in funding allotted to Pennsylvania was gone by October 2022, with over 40,000 Pennsylvanians receiving much-needed relief.

Funding for LIHWAP Ceases; Need Remains

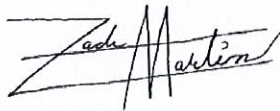
While funding for LIHEAP (heating & cooling) has been in place for more than 50 years, **funding for LIHWAP (water and wastewater) was temporary and quickly exhausted with needs remaining.** Unfortunately, the same customers who struggle paying heating and cooling bills also struggle paying water and wastewater bills.

Consequently, receiving assistance for one utility bill and not the other undermines the overall effectiveness of customer assistance programs like LIHEAP and LIHWAP, leaving low-income customers in the same predicament.

The WUC estimates that there is a \$60 million need for LIHWAP assistance in the Commonwealth; however, with termination of the federal LIHWAP fast approaching, a state LIHWAP program and appropriation in FY 2023-24 or FY 2024-25 will be necessary to help customers that continue to struggle with their water and wastewater bills, as customer arrearages remain high post-COVID and still have not normalized to pre-COVID levels. Coupled with water or wastewater system's customer assistance programs (CAP), a state LIHWAP program will help prevent utility shut offs for water and wastewater system customers.

Therefore, to further assist low-income water and wastewater customers across Pennsylvania struggling with their bills, the **WUC respectfully requests the committee to consider and support Senate Bill 767.** We are open to further dialogue about the size of the state appropriation (perhaps something along the lines of the state appropriation for LIHEAP), but Senate Bill 767 is an important first step to establish a state LIHWAP in the Commonwealth.

Respectfully submitted,



Zach Martin
PA-AWWA



Marc A. Lucca
NAWC-PA

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennie Shade". The first letter "J" is large and loops around, with "ennie" written in smaller letters and "Shade" at the end.

Jennie Shade
PMAA

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Serena DiMagno". The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized.

Serena DiMagno
WWOAP

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joseph Falcone". The signature is very fluid and somewhat stylized.

Joseph Falcone
PRWA

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pat Caulfield". The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized.

Pat Caulfield
WUC Chairman