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Lawmakers, advocates call for swift action on critical water affordability bills

Proposed statewide program would help address Michigan's water affordability crisis, protect the health of our communities

LANSING, MI – **State Senator Stephanie Chang** (D - Detroit), **State Senator John Damoose** (R - Charlevoix), **House Majority Floor Leader Abraham Aiyash** (D - Hamtramck), and a broad coalition of municipal water providers, public health experts, social service providers, faith leaders, and water advocates yesterday held a virtual press conference highlighting critical legislation that will address Michigan's water affordability crisis and calling swift action to pass the bill package before the end of the lame duck legislative session.

[**A recording of the press conference is available online →**](#)

Introduced earlier this year, [Senate Bills 25, 549-554, 722, and 980 and House Bills 5088-5093](#) would tackle a top kitchen-table issue by addressing Michigan's water affordability crisis while promoting equity, economic stability, and public health for all residents. The bills were developed through extensive collaboration with local governments, water utilities, and community organizations.

“Our goal is simple: to ensure that no family has to choose between paying their water bill, keeping the lights and heat on, or putting food on the table,” said **State Senator Stephanie Chang** (D - Detroit). “This issue affects families in urban, suburban, and rural communities alike, in every county in Michigan, and our legislation addresses these challenges head-on protecting public health, all while investing in our local water providers and water infrastructure to help stabilize their rising costs.”

“This bill package isn’t just about addressing water affordability – it’s about doing so in a way that makes fiscal sense,” said **State Senator John Damoose** (R - Charlevoix). “By capping water bills at 2-3% of income for low-income households and creating a sustainable funding source, we’re making an investment that pays off in the long run.”

“Water affordability is not just a financial challenge for families – it’s a moral challenge our state must finally address. No one should ever have to live without water because they can’t afford it,” said **Majority Floor Leader Abraham Aiyash** (D - Hamtramck). “Water shutoff protections will prevent families from losing access to water without ample notice and support. And the creation of a state office dedicated to water access sends a clear message: Michigan prioritizes its people.”

“In Macomb County and across Michigan, families are feeling the squeeze of rising utility costs, and water is often the most difficult to manage,” said **Sterling Heights City Councilmember Henry Yanez** “By capping water bills for low-income households and providing arrearage forgiveness, we’re giving residents a fair chance to stay on track. And by creating a sustainable funding source, we’re ensuring our water systems remain strong and reliable for everyone.”

“Many seniors in Michigan live on fixed incomes that haven’t kept pace with rising utility costs. When water bills rise, these individuals are often forced to make heartbreaking decisions: Do they pay for water, food, or medication? This is a choice no one should have to make,” said **Dave LaLumia**, a representative for **Area Agencies on Aging Association of Michigan**. “This bill package addresses these challenges by capping water bills, protecting critical care customers, and ensuring that no senior faces a shutoff without support.”

“Water affordability impacts our clients, from families to seniors and everyone in between. When families can’t afford their water bills, it sets off a chain reaction of challenges, from health issues to housing instability,” said **Joe Nolan**, executive director of **Chippewa Luce Mackinac Community Action Agency**. “The proposed water affordability program is a game-changer for the communities we serve. It not only caps bills but also provides funding for plumbing repairs and arrearage forgiveness, addressing the underlying issues that drive costs higher for struggling households.”

“As the official public policy voice of the Catholic Church in this state, we are called to advocate for those in need and to support public policies that promote life. Because it is essential to human flourishing and human dignity, the Catholic Church teaches that access to clean and affordable water is a basic right,” said **Tom Hickson**, vice president of public policy and advocacy for the **Michigan Catholic Conference**. “It is our responsibility to care for God’s creation, to which the Church has consistently spoken; this legislation contributes to that mission. It seeks to ensure that water is accessible to everyone, for both the present and future generations.”

“As healthcare professionals, we see every day how critical clean, accessible water is to the health and well-being of our patients and communities,” said **Jayne DeBoer-Rowse**, a representative for the **Michigan Nurses Association**. “By ensuring that families can afford their water bills and by protecting critical care customers from shutoffs, we are addressing both the symptoms and the root causes of this crisis. These measures will prevent health emergencies and save lives.”

The need for the proposed statewide program is underscored by data from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) showing over 317,000 Michigan households were behind on water bills in 2020 across urban, suburban, and rural areas. Administered by MDHHS in collaboration with community organizations, the program

would ensure affordable access to clean water, financial relief for struggling families, and financial stability for water utilities via reliable revenue for operations and maintenance.

[Watch a recording of the press conference here →](#)



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