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Senate of Pennsylvania

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July 6, 2020

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

In Re: Docket No. R-2020-3017951
Docket No. R-2020-3017970

Dear Administrative Law Judges Long and DeVoe,

I write to oppose the rate increases proposed by the Pennsylvania Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA) for water and wastewater services to approximately 80,000 residential, commercial, and industrial customers in Pittsburgh and the surrounding communities.

While I would strenuously object to raising rates for the average customer over 25% over the course of two years in ordinary times, Allegheny County residents are not living in ordinary times. In May 2020, the most recent month that we have data for, Allegheny County had a 13.1% unemployment rate, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics. That is more than 3 times 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 an essential utility 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. While Allegheny County has entered the "green phase" of Governor Wolf's opening plan, the County has consistently set new record high case counts in the past week. Additionally, the percentage of tests administered has jumped from an average of 1-2% in late May and early June to 9% on June 25, 2020. These increases have led the Allegheny County Health Department and the County Executive to issue additional restrictions on restaurants and bars, many of which would be affected by this rate increase. In these rapidly changing times, we simply cannot ask our businesses, particularly our small businesses, to shoulder this rate increase.

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I applaud PWSA for continuing to work towards replacing outdated and dangerous lead lines and for modernizing its systems to provide improved services for all customers. However, I cannot support such an enormous rate increase to our neighbors and small businesses, especially in a time when so many of them are facing reduced or no income due to COVID-19 mitigation efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lindsey M. Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.

Lindsey M. Williams
38th Senatorial District