



March 15, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

A recent University of Michigan study¹ found that 3.2% of Metro Detroit residents and 13% of Detroit residents live in inadequate housing. Each day, our team at Wayne Metro Community Action Agency helps clients dealing with such issues as broken furnaces, leaking roofs, and a range of plumbing needs, to name a few. Yet, the need for home and plumbing repair is not a Wayne County issue. It is, in fact, urgent and statewide. Recent data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey estimates households across Michigan are "lacking complete plumbing facilities" – including over 900 households in Kent County, over 790 in Genesee County, over 130 in Marquette County, and beyond.

Wayne Metro Community Action Agency, which serves Wayne County and has assisted 1,000+ homes with major plumbing repairs with State COVID relief funds, sees what this data means in practice. It means a resident like Mr. Willis, a senior on fixed income who had to pump out sewage water from his basement every day so that he could do laundry for his daughter with a disability (please find his testimony on Wayne Metro's YouTube page²). It means a low-income resident like Mr. A, who Wayne Metro visited several weeks ago, who received a \$919.54 water bill and was unaware that he had two leaking toilets causing the high bill.

Residents in these situations simply cannot get ahead, even with help from existing programs. For example, the new Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) provides much needed bill assistance across the state. However, please consider the potential dismay of a struggling resident like Mr. A, who might apply for help in order to get out from under his crushing water bill. If he were to receive only bill assistance, his current \$919.54 bill might be paid, but then he would still face another \$900 water bill the next cycle, and then again next cycle, and then again the next. He would be right back where he started. Coupling bill assistance with plumbing repair solves not just the immediate crisis, but more importantly the root issue. Plumbing repair helps ensure Mr. A would be able to save, to invest, and to afford food, education, housing, transportation, or whatever helps his family the most.

Beyond water assistance, Michigan is also receiving double to triple the current funding for the Weatherization Assistance Program, which provides much needed energy efficiency upgrades for low income residents. Like a high water bill, low-income residents cannot get ahead if they are paying 10%, 20%, or even more of their income to their energy bill each month. However, home repair and plumbing issues often prevent residents who need Weatherization assistance the most from entering into the program.

¹<https://detroiturvey.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/DMACS-ARPA-funds-to-meet-home-repair-needs-reduced.pdf>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbOBRNT7E8U>



For example, if Mr. Willis attempted to enroll in Weatherization, the sewage backed up in his basement would need to be addressed first, and if Mr. Willis could not afford costly expenses necessary to address that issue first, he would not be able to move forward with Weatherization and achieve long term utility stability.

While the expansion of water bill assistance and Weatherization programs is undoubtedly important, additional home and plumbing repair support will ensure all funds will be as successful as possible. Moreover, funds distributed in the manner proposed by MDHHS would be administered by local Community Action Agencies, ensuring that local authorities can meet their community's specific needs and create good, green jobs. For example, in Wayne County, Wayne Metro has leveraged other funding to create an "On the Job Training" program which is a pre-apprenticeship program that provides paid training and job experience for low-income residents in our plumbing, weatherization, and home repair work.

Please feel free to share this letter, accompanying materials, and video with any and all who might be interested in moving this initiative forward. I would also like to offer our own time, manpower, and expertise as resources to help in your progress. I am open to talk anytime on this issue, and please don't hesitate to reach out.

All the best,

Louis D. Piszker
Chief Executive Officer



3-16-22

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