

**House Natural Resources, Environment, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation
Committee**

HB 5088, 5090, 5091 Neutral Party Testimony

**Commissioner Mary Alice Adams
Benton Harbor, Michigan**

Good morning Chair Pohutsky, Majority Vice Chair Hill, and Minority Vice Chair Martin. I'm glad to have the chance to speak today. My name is Mary Alice Adams, and I am a city commissioner of Benton Harbor, Michigan.

I've lived in Benton Harbor most of my life. In the last decade, water bills have nearly doubled. Most of our residents are very, very poor, and while we're paying more for the basics, we've also learned our water is not reliably safe or clean.

I've seen what happens when the bottom falls out. In my community, that looks like poor folks having to scramble to replace pipes that are seeping toxins into their family's drinking water. It looks like people who are the least able to pay having to shoulder the financial burden of a crumbling and aging water system.

In my personal life, I've experienced how quickly one can go from relatively being secure to no longer being able to afford this essential resource. After a cancer diagnosis and treatment, a divorce, and the sudden loss of my business, I am no longer able to afford the \$100 or more water bill I'm charged each month.

I ask you, how is that possible? How can we, in 2023, have people living in fear that in our most vulnerable moments, we'll be further punished and traumatized by losing the dignity of access to clean, safe drinking water?

I commend this body for considering how to alleviate this fear and the meaningful ways this proposed legislation can make a difference and impact and improve the quality of life for those that have entrusted us to do so.

But I'm also here to make sure you consider those who will be left to fall through the cracks and to urge you to strengthen this proposal in a few critical ways:

- First, 18 months may seem like a quick timeline to implement a new program, but that is an eternity when you're in fear of losing your water and falling further and further into debt. I ask you to add immediate enrollment into the program to prevent water shutoffs while the program is being stood-up.

Second, please consider amending the bill package to ensure that if funding dries up, those who rely on the protections will not face an increase in what they're required to pay. Just as my

community of Benton Harbor has been asked to shoulder the financial burden of a poorly managed water filtration system, we cannot ask the most vulnerable in our state to give even more of what little they have due to funding concerns.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.