



Ed Siaje, Chairman of the Board  
Darlene Hudson, Ed.D., President & CEO

**Date:** June 24, 2025

**To:** Chairman Roth and Members of the House Appropriations Human Services Sub-Committee

**From:** Kyle DuBuc, Vice-President, Communications & Advocacy, United Way for Southeastern Michigan

**Subject:** Support for funding the Water Assistance Program

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**Chairman Roth and Members of the House Appropriations Human Services Sub-Committee:**

As an organization that partners with Oakland County to provide crucial relief to residents struggling to afford their water and sewer bills through the Hardship Assistance Program, United Way for Southeastern Michigan urges the sub-committee to protect Michiganders' health by allocating the \$60 million necessary to sustain the Water Assistance Program.

Our team at United Way for Southeastern Michigan works every day to understand and meet the needs of families across Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties. Our goal is to help those experiencing hard times not just move from crisis to stability, but ultimately from stability to prosperity. We know from experience that the Water Assistance Program acts as a crucial lifeline, helping those we serve stay clean, housed, and healthy.

According to the ALICE report published by the Michigan Association of United Ways, two out of five Michigan households aren't earning enough to cover the cost of a barebones household budget.<sup>1</sup> Even adjusting for inflation, water bills have nearly doubled since 1980.<sup>2</sup> In 2022, 145,400 Michigan households faced unaffordable water and sewer bills that totaled more than 5% of their incomes.<sup>3</sup> These rising costs force many of our families

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<sup>1</sup><https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61802352224f2a00897ee6aa/t/682b663f9e64e51e602c041d/1747674698459/State+of+ALICE+Michigan+Report+2025.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.miwaterplan.com/\\_files/ugd/830ba4\\_7509564f503943c0b8f3726db73c7b6d.pdf](https://www.miwaterplan.com/_files/ugd/830ba4_7509564f503943c0b8f3726db73c7b6d.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.miwaterplan.com/\\_files/ugd/830ba4\\_f21ac8ce502c481f9fc8554c95b336fe.pdf](https://www.miwaterplan.com/_files/ugd/830ba4_f21ac8ce502c481f9fc8554c95b336fe.pdf)

and seniors to make impossible choices between putting food on the table and the water they use to clean, drink, and cook.

<sup>4</sup>Seniors on fixed incomes tend to be among those hardest hit by high water bills. Out of all Michiganders who spent more than 5% of their incomes on water in 2018, 44% were seniors.<sup>5</sup> In 2023, more than half of Michigan households headed by seniors didn't bring in enough income to cover a basic household budget.<sup>6</sup> With fixed incomes failing to keep pace with inflation, older Michiganders increasingly risk falling into debt or losing access to the water they need to stay healthy.

Lack of access to clean, safe water is a public health risk. A study by researchers at Henry Ford found that those living on blocks with mass water shutoffs were 1.55 times more likely to experience water-associated illnesses.<sup>7</sup> Even in communities that don't implement shutoffs, struggling to keep up with water bills can create significant financial and personal burdens. In Michigan, cities can impose tax liens and, in some cases, even claim the homes of those who cannot pay their water bills.<sup>8</sup>

Since the beginning of 2023, in Southeastern Michigan alone, more than 10,000 people have called our 2-1-1 helpline asking for assistance paying their water bills. The Water Assistance Program supports the local organizations that these callers rely on, allowing them to fill in the gaps. The program currently serves almost 18,000 Michiganders from our region, helping them pay down their bills, create payment plans, and restore their water.<sup>9</sup> Without this funding, many of the Michiganders we serve will have nowhere to turn.

As the Great Lakes state, we must ensure that water bills are affordable for those least able to pay and that no one loses water when they struggle to make ends meet. I ask that

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2017/07/26/detroit-water-shutoffs/512243001/#:~:text=A%20preliminary%20study%20conducted%20by,with%20a%20water%20associated%20illness.>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.miwaterplan.com/\\_files/ugd/830ba4\\_7509564f503943c0b8f3726db73c7b6d.pdf](https://www.miwaterplan.com/_files/ugd/830ba4_7509564f503943c0b8f3726db73c7b6d.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61802352224f2a00897ee6aa/t/682b663f9e64e51e602c041d/1747674698459/State+of+ALICE+Michigan+Report+2025.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2017/07/26/detroit-water-shutoffs/512243001/#:~:text=A%20preliminary%20study%20conducted%20by,with%20a%20water%20associated%20illness.>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.michiganpublic.org/politics-government/2016-08-12/citizen-research-links-detroit-water-shutoffs-tax-foreclosures>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/assistance-programs/water-assistance-program>



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you help safeguard the health and well-being of our residents and ensure that Michigan continues to lead the way in water access by fully funding the Water Assistance Program.

Sincerely,

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