



October 12, 2023

Subject: The Urgent Need for a Water Affordability Program Benefiting All Michiganders

Dear Representatives,

Michigan Community Action represents the 27 Community Action Agencies across Michigan. Community Action Agencies empower local communities in the fight against poverty, leveraging the federal Community Services Block Grant to bring millions of dollars of funding to aid poor Michiganders in achieving social and economic sustainability.

Our members are on the front lines of the fight against poverty, and they see the symptoms and causes of poverty in Michigan firsthand. From Michigan's most rural to its most urban communities, water affordability is an issue facing many of our members' clients. The cost for basic water and sewer service has increased statewide, all while incomes for working families and benefits for those on a fixed income, often the disabled and elderly, remain stagnant. The Federal Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) provided some relief during the past few years, but it is expiring shortly. Michigan needs to fill the gap.

Senate Bills 549 through 554 and House Bills 5088 through 5093 take meaningful steps to ameliorate this basic cost of living challenge facing families and the elderly in each of your districts. Michigan Community Action urges the passage of these bills out of committee as quickly as possible; many of your constituents cannot afford for you to wait.

This legislation builds on successful models Community Action Agencies already participate in statewide and nationally. The Michigan Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) provides tens of millions of dollars of utility assistance funding to Michiganders. Providing a similar program for water assistance would be a boon to consumers statewide. MEAP works in partnership with utility services providers. It lessens the burden on both consumers and utilities by paying down arrearages and increasing affordability for those most in need. While certainly a benefit to utilities, the program beneficiaries also win, unlocking financial flexibility and independence through program participation.

We urge you to join us in supporting this important legislation. Building on the success of MEAP for the benefit of our members' clients, and your constituents, will have a lasting impact on millions of Michiganders present and future. Please let us know if you would like to speak to the Community Action Agency in your district about the benefits of this legislation to your constituents.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian McGrain".

Brian McGrain, Director
Michigan Community Action