

Testimony of Jim Nash
Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner

Before the House Committee on Natural Resources,
Environment, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation

Hearing on House Bills 5088'23, 5089'23, 5090'23, 5091'23, and 5092'23

Thursday, October 26, 2023, 10:30 a.m.

Thank you, Chair Pohutsky, and all members of the Natural Resources, Environment, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee for the opportunity to testify today regarding House Bills 5088, 5089, 5090, 5091, and 5092 of 2023, collectively, the Water Affordability Package.

I was first elected as the Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner in 2012 and, for over a decade, I have been charged with the responsibility of protecting public health and safety by managing drinking water, sewer, and stormwater systems throughout Oakland County. My office employees over 350 people who perform operations and maintenance for 22 local water systems that collectively service over 175,000 citizens throughout Oakland County.

I am deeply committed to serving Oakland County residents, but my work extends beyond county borders. As many say, water knows no boundaries. Regional collaboration and community partnership are central to my work as commissioner. In this role, I helped develop and stand up the Great Lakes Water Authority; I organize and host regional summits to bring together experts from local governments, businesses, and academia; and I co-chair the Water Infrastructure Task for the Southeast Michigan Council of Government. I have an incredibly dedicated team of professionals who are passionate about the level of service we provide to the communities we serve. Our leadership as a utility has received local, state, and national recognition, including being named a Utility of the Future back-to-back years from the Water Environment Federation.

However, some of the work I am proudest of is our effort to address the chronic issue of water affordability. A grant from Michigan's Department of Environment and Great Lakes made it possible for us to assemble a community coalition, hire national consultants, and build an internal project team of attorneys, engineers, and policy experts, to spend nearly two years researching the issue of affordability. At the end of those two years, we provided a report, *Water Affordability Solutions: A Utility Perspective*, detailing practical and feasible solutions.

Our primary recommendation was a statewide affordability plan with a dedicated and sustainable funding source modeled after the Michigan Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) that has been in place for over decade. I support the Water Affordability Package because it does just that. The bills codify key recommendations and solutions that, after extensive research and business analysis, we determined could be reasonably implemented by the water utilities we operate.

For a minimal per meter fee of just \$2 per month, there will be approximately \$65 million to support the water affordability program. The program is designed to: (1) eliminate existing water debt that will reduce household financial burdens and improve the fiscal stability of utilities; (2) provide income-based water bills that achieve a targeted affordability level for low-income customers and provide consistent rate recovery for utilities; and (3) support healthy, safe, and livable homes by offering household plumbing repairs that will mitigate water loss, reduce water bills, address inefficiencies, and protect public health.

This statewide affordability program, coupled with traditional financing through grants and loans, will ensure that water utilities in Michigan can make more secure and sustainable investments in the water infrastructure that protects the health and safety of all its residents.

Thank you for considering this incredibly important and historic Water Affordability Package and I urge you to take action to pass House Bills 5088, 5089, 5090, 5091, and 5092 of 2023.

Respectfully submitted,



Jim Nash