

**RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF DEKALB COUNTY SUPPORTING POLICY
CHANGES TO PROTECT SENIORS, DISABLED INDIVIDUALS, AND LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS
AGAINST UPCOMING WATER RATE INCREASES**

Whereas, the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners acknowledges its responsibility for raising sufficient revenues to support the water and sewer utility through adoption of rates, pursuant to Section 9 of the DeKalb County Organizational Act; and,

Whereas, amendments to the Water and Sewer Rate Structure offers the financial capacity to address aging infrastructure and years of deferred maintenance, which have led to increased operational costs and the need for significant investment in repairs and upgrades; and,

Whereas, the aging water infrastructure poses risks to water quality and reliability, necessitating immediate attention to ensure the safety and health of the community; and,

Whereas, the Board recognizes that while rate increases are critical for long-term sustainability and reliability of water services, they can disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, including seniors, individuals with disabilities, and low-income families; and,

Whereas, the Board of Commissioners believes that access to clean and affordable water is a fundamental human right essential for the health and well-being of all residents; and,

Whereas, many seniors and disabled individuals often live on fixed incomes, making it challenging to absorb additional costs associated with essential services like water; and,

Whereas, low-income residents may already face financial hardships that could be exacerbated by increased utility costs, potentially leading to detrimental effects on their health and quality of life; and,

Whereas, efficient consumption of precious water resources and the equitable allocation of costs to users for the water and sewer components of the system is best achieved through the rate structure applied to an accurate reflection of actual use through DeKalb's metering system; and,

Whereas, the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners is committed to fostering an inclusive community where all residents have access to essential services, including clean and affordable water, without financial hardship, thereby promoting water equity for all; and,

Whereas, it is essential to align water rate increases with policy priorities that mitigate their impact on the most vulnerable populations; and,

Whereas, the rate structure also offers the capacity to address important policy goals, including but not limited to:

- Ensuring rates are affordable to ratepayers,
- Providing utility services affordable to qualified low-income residents who cannot afford prevailing rates,
- Ensuring that component rates for both water and sewer are set to avoid cross subsidy from one utility to another,
- Ensuring that consumers pay only for the services they use; and,

Whereas, effective policy solutions implemented in other cities, such as Baltimore, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Austin, provide a framework for addressing water affordability and access; and,

Whereas, implementing policies that address water affordability will financially benefit DeKalb County. Studies show that affordable utility bills lead to higher and more consistent payment rates, enabling easier revenue collection and decreasing expenses related to shutoff and late payment notices; and,

Whereas, under DeKalb County's Organizational Act, it is essential that the Board of Commissioners' policy priorities be enacted through the rate structure rather than administrative policies, grant programs, or other actions beyond the authority of the Board of Commissioners.

Now, Therefore, Be It Resolved, that the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners directs the presentation of a Water and Sewer Rate Structure for consideration that achieves the following policy priorities:

- 1. Establishing Shutoff Protections:** The Rate Structure shall include policies that protect vulnerable populations from water shutoffs, similar to those enacted in Philadelphia and Chicago. This includes prohibiting shutoffs for households with children, seniors, individuals with disabilities, and those undergoing financial hardship or facing medical conditions that require consistent water access.
- 2. Creating an Income-Based Water Affordability Plan:** The Rate Structure shall include Income-Based Water Affordability Plans similar to those utilized in Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago, where lower-income households pay a smaller percentage of their income toward water and sewer services.
- 3. Ensuring the Self-Sufficiency of the Water and Sewer Rate Structure:** The Rate Structure shall demonstrate that water and sewer rates, in aggregate, support the operation, maintenance and expansion of these system elements without cross subsidy, resulting in an equitable burden for users of each service proportional to consumption.
- 4. Ensuring that Customers Pay Only for the Services They Use:** The Rate Structure shall recognize the differential between water and sewer consumption associated with casual irrigation, consumptive use of water in production processes and other conditions that currently result in a charge to consumers for sewer services they do not use; and,

Be It Further Resolved, that the Board of Commissioners directs the following administrative undertakings:

Developing an Office of Water-Customer Advocacy: Following Baltimore's model, establish an office to serve as a neutral intermediary for residents facing billing disputes, providing assistance and ensuring fair treatment. This office would also advocate for improvements to communication and access to social services.

Conducting an Impact Assessment: Prior to any rate increase, conduct a thorough assessment to evaluate the potential impact on vulnerable populations and seek public input to inform decisions.

Promoting Community Education: Increase outreach efforts to educate residents about water conservation and available assistance programs to help them manage their water usage and costs; and,

Be It Further Resolved that the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners commits to advocating for the implementation of these policies to ensure that all residents, particularly the most vulnerable, have access to affordable water services while addressing the pressing need for infrastructure improvements.

Resolved this _____ day of _____ 2024.

ADOPTED by the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners, this ___ day of _____ 2024

Mereda Davis Johnson

Presiding Officer

Board of Commissioners

DeKalb County, Georgia

APPROVED by the Chief Executive Officer, this _____ day of _____, 2024

Michael Thurmond

Chief Executive Officer

DeKalb County, Georgia

ATTEST:

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

BARBARA SANDERS

County Clerk

Board of Commissioners and

Chief Executive Officer

Viviane Ernstes

County Attorney

DeKalb County, Georgia