

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 11, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
S-230 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
H-204 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
S-221 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Thank you for your strong leadership in delivering the bipartisan emergency coronavirus response bill as a first step to provide urgently needed funds for the response effort to the coronavirus outbreak. As Congress considers further legislative actions as the outbreak spreads, Congress must work together to provide relief for Americans, including those facing high water bills, that may impact the virus' ability to spread.

As a part of its recommendations to prevent the spread of coronavirus, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is recommending Americans regularly wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This guidance from health experts is a proven way to reduce exposure and prevent the spread of all diseases, including the coronavirus. However, in many communities across the country, access to clean and affordable water continues to be a challenge.

Access to clean drinking water is a basic human right. Some of the poorest communities in America pay the highest water rates in the country. Many communities facing larger systemic issues like job loss, population loss and failing infrastructure have resorted to increasing water rates, shifting the cost burden to local ratepayers. In a survey of the 500 largest water systems in the country it was found that on average Flint, Mich. residents paid about \$864 a year for water service, nearly double the national average. But Flint is not alone. In other communities nationwide, high water rates have especially hurt low-income households, who pay a disproportionate amount of their income for water service.

To maintain service, utilities have increasingly relied on water shutoffs for people behind on their bills. In 2016, a nationwide assessment of water shutoffs for non-payment revealed that households across the U.S. are facing an alarming water affordability crisis—an estimated 15 million people in the U.S. experienced a water shutoff, a shocking one out of every 20 households. Water shutoffs disproportionately impact cities with higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and people of color. In the city of Detroit, for example, 112,000 households had their water shut off between 2014 and 2018. In 2017 alone, it was estimated that one in 10 Detroiters experienced a shutoff. While in recent days the state of Michigan and Detroit have taken proactive measures to restore water service to communities during this crisis to mitigate health risks from the coronavirus, sadly, this issue spans well beyond Michigan. More communities across the U.S. will be facing the same challenges and must have the resources to act.

Thus, as Congress considers additional legislative actions to address the coronavirus, we must work together, in a bipartisan fashion, to provide relief for communities with high water bills. It is unconscionable that during an infectious disease outbreak, like with the coronavirus, communities would continue to shut off people's access to water. Surely in the richest country in the world, we can ensure that every American has access to safe and affordable water.

The federal government, working closely with state and local governments, must ensure that we stop water shutoffs and restore water service to any households that have lost service. While some communities might voluntarily agree to not conduct shutoffs, this decision increases fiscal strain on already struggling communities and they will require additional federal support.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,



Daniel T. Kildee
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Rashida Tlaib
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Debbie Dingell
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Andy Levin
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Haley M. Stevens
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Elissa Slotkin
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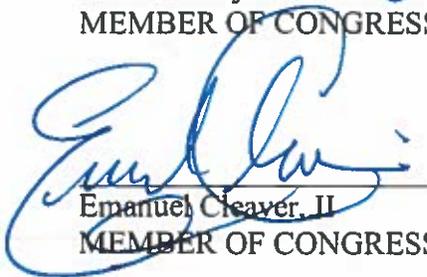
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