

From: Erickson, Tina
Sent: Tuesday, June 17, 2025 12:32 PM
To: Erickson, Tina; Gallagher, Matthew
Subject: FW: Support for Federal Low Income Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP)
Attachments: Support Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program at the Dept of Health and Human Services - 2025.pdf

Dear Council Members and Mayor:

In light of recent concerns raised about the affordability of the proposed stormwater utility rate increase, I am writing to encourage you to reach out to our federal representatives in support of renewed funding for the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP), administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

While investments in water, sanitary sewer and stormwater infrastructure in our community are crucial for many reasons, including public health, environmental protection, and economic well-being; we also recognize the financial pressure that rate increases can place on customers, especially those with fixed or limited incomes. Programs like LIHWAP are critical tools that help strike a balance between affordability and the need for infrastructure investment.

Congress created LIHWAP in 2020 to help low-income households maintain access to affordable water and wastewater services, while also ensuring utilities could continue making the critical investments needed to protect public health. This program was especially important for communities like La Crosse, where many residents benefitted from this support between 2020 and 2023.

Unfortunately, funding for LIHWAP expired in 2023, and Congress has not yet authorized new funding to continue this vital assistance. While our community does not disconnect water service for non-payment, customers who fall behind accrue late fees and penalties, which only deepen their financial hardship. At the same time, the utilities experience revenue losses that must be made up by further rate increases or reduction in funding of essential operations and infrastructure improvements.

To provide more background, I have attached a summary document created by the American Water Works Association that outlines the benefits of the LIHWAP program and highlights why continued funding is so important to utilities and the communities they serve.

I urge each of you to consider contacting our congressional delegation to voice support for reinstating and funding LIHWAP in the next appropriations cycle. Doing so would help protect public health, support low-income households, and ensure the sustainability of our community water and sewer systems.

Thank you for your continued advocacy and leadership on behalf of La Crosse residents.

Sincerely,

Tina Erickson
Utilities Finance & Compliance Manager

La Crosse Utilities (Water – Sewer - Storm)
City of La Crosse
400 La Crosse Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

Office: 608.789.7520

Cell: 608.860.0981

Alternate Email: utilities@cityoflacrosse.org

Webpage: www.cityoflacrosse.org/utilities

SUPPORT A PERMANENT LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLD WATER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



OUR ASK

Support a permanent Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

BACKGROUND

According to HHS, 20% of households nationwide are in debt to their water utility as water rates have increased 43% over the last decade. At the same time, utilities continue to face financial challenges related to aging infrastructure, new regulatory actions, and supply chain constraints. Congress created LIHWAP in 2020 to help low-income families maintain access to affordable water service while providing utilities with the revenue needed to continue making investments necessary to protect public health. However, the program expired in 2023 and has not been funded since.

- **Water utilities must invest \$1.25 trillion over the next twenty years.** According to EPA surveys, drinking water and wastewater utilities must invest \$1.25 trillion over the next twenty years just to repair, replace, and expand existing infrastructure.
- **These costs are largely shouldered by ratepayers.** While Congress has made significant investments in water infrastructure, the need still far outpaces available funds. Because ratepayers typically contribute more than 90% of water systems' revenue, ratepayers will shoulder the bulk of these investments.
- **LIHWAP relieves pressure on families and the social safety net.** By reducing water bills and clearing arrearages for low-income families, LIHWAP helps these families maintain or restore access to water service and stay in their homes.
- **LIHWAP also helps water utilities maintain revenue needed for investment.** When ratepayers can't afford water service, water utilities lose revenue needed to sustain the system and repair, replace, and upgrade critical infrastructure.
- **LIHWAP helped nearly two million families.** Over two years, the program provided \$1.1 billion in assistance to more than 1.5 million households across 49 states, the District of Columbia, five U.S. territories, and 97 Native American tribes and Tribal organizations.

AWWA

Founded in 1881, AWWA is the largest organization of water supply professionals in the world. Our membership includes more than 4,300 utilities that supply roughly 80% of North America's drinking water and treat almost half of North America's wastewater. Our 50,000 members represent the full spectrum of the water community: water and wastewater systems, environmental advocates, scientists, academicians, and others who hold a genuine interest in water, our most vital resource.