

June 30, 2014

Mr. Kevyn D. Orr, Emergency Manager
City of Detroit
Office of the Emergency Manager
City of Detroit
2 Woodward Avenue
Suite 116
Detroit, MI 48226

Ms. Susan F. McCormick
Director
Detroit Water and Sewerage Department
735 Randolph
Detroit, Michigan 48226

Dear Mr. Orr and Ms. McCormick:

We are writing to you today as Detroit and national religious leaders representing over 40,000 congregants, members and supporters who are concerned about the serious impacts resulting from the mass water shut-offs announced by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department. The shut offs have had and will have very serious impacts on Detroit's lowest income residents. We respectfully urge you to consider restoring water service to households most at risk immediately and to impose a moratorium on residential water shut offs until effective measures to protect human health and families are in place in our city.

The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department issued a press release on June 25th reporting that 46,000 shut off notices were sent in the month of May, with over 4,000 of those executed. The number of residents affected was not reported. Michigan Welfare Rights Organization has evidence that the number may be 3,000 households per week. There are few protections for infants and children under six years old, low-income elders, chronically ill, or disabled people, including military veterans. In addition to jeopardizing residents' health, these shutoffs threaten family integrity, as Child Protective Services responds to homes that no longer have access to water and sanitation. We are deeply troubled by the implications this decision has for family life in Detroit.

We urge you to take immediate steps to ensure that residents' health and families are not at risk by:

- Putting into place robust administrative procedures to expedite and allow hundreds of residential accounts to make payment plans.
- When and where the payment plans are not manageable for our households, Detroit Water and Sewer Department should establish measures for rescheduling of the debt for the poorest families for within their means. Low-income residents should pay a maximum of 10% of the current account due, or less, depending on

the income of the households. In no case should payment exceed 2.5% of the monthly household income.

- Detroit Water and Sewerage Department should waive the required medical certification by a health care provider for the medical emergency exemption. Residents may not yet be covered by health care and scheduling appointments with providers will unnecessarily delay and put at further risk consumers.
- Detroit and Michigan child welfare services must take concrete action to ensure child protective services carefully investigates each case before terminating parental custodial care on a water shut off notice without other evidence of imminent harm to the child. We must give our parents and guardians' time and support to make alternative arrangements.
- Detroit Water and Sewer Department should establish clear policies that prohibit water shut offs to households where there are children under six years of age and low income seniors, the chronically ill, and people with disabilities – those of our neighbors for whom a water shut off poses an extraordinary burden.
- Detroit Water and Sewer Department should establish affordability guidelines that ensure our residents do not give up food, medicines, or put at risk their homes by having to pay bills in lieu of rent. Guidelines for low-income affordability should include setting a rate that does not exceed 2.5% of monthly household income. In no case should a home be foreclosed for liens against the property from unpaid water service debt. Residents should not put at risk telecommunications in order to pay their water bills. Being able to call upon emergency services (police, fire department and ambulance), and in communication with schools, work and medical providers is an essential part of modern life, particularly when alternatives such as public telephones are not available.

Our faith tradition calls us to honor the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. We understand that we all have a most basic human right to water in order to preserve health, families, and dignity.

Thank you for your kind attention to this request. We will look forward to your response and to working with you in any way we can to support an alternative path forward in our city.

Respectfully yours,

Rev. Peter Morales, President, Unitarian Universalist Association

Rev. Dr. William F. Schulz, President and CEO, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

[Detroit Metro area UU clergy signatures here – with name and city of congregation]