

# Resolution Calling For Federal Funding of a Sustainable Water Affordability Plan Similar to the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) -

WHEREAS, The maintenance of continuous residential water access by all is particularly critical at the present time, in order to permit residents to maintain hand washing, home cleaning, and other sanitation measures to assist in dealing with the deadly health impacts of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic; and

WHEREAS, The need for a subsidy to support long term, sustainable and affordable access to water and sewerage services for the benefit of low income residential customers will not end after the COVID-19 pandemic is better controlled, providing an opportunity to implement new policies going forward. On the contrary, unaffordability of these services for the poor is a permanent menace to public health; and

WHEREAS, Congress should create and adequately fund a national water rates subsidy program similar to the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP); and

WHEREAS, The LIHEAP program receives and expends approximately \$3.5 billion annually to support gas and electric heating utility costs for low income residents throughout the United States; and

WHEREAS, Based on the same realities that lead the federal government to recognize the need to support low income families by subsidizing energy, it is time to also provide a robust federal subsidy for the precious resource of clean and safe drinking water; and

WHEREAS, Unfortunately, due to the high cost of providing clean, safe engineered drinking water, including compliance with federal regulations, this resource is seeing an alarming rise in retail rates across the country. While there is often a call for municipalities to become the “water bank” and provide free or subsidized water, this works disproportionate hardship on the already strained financial resources of lower average income communities, making the federal government the proper entity to fund necessary water subsidies for low income families. This is demonstrated by the popular and successful LIHEAP program; and

WHEREAS, Affordable water is a health, safety and welfare issue that is implicitly recognized not only by the recent reconnection of water services to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, but also by the existence of the LIHEAP program for low income electric and gas home heating. Water also needs to be recognized and supported for our most vulnerable residents as a utility that is directly tied to the support of life; and

WHEREAS, LIHEAP supports the 1% of customers who cannot pay their energy bills at any given time. This ensures continuity of service, promotes public health, avoids late fees that stack up, and keeps customers on file to pay their bills when they are solvent again, and

WHEREAS, LIHEAP programs help the elderly, the disabled, low income homes, and homes in crisis, and

WHEREAS, These programs can be funded through a mix of non-profits, regular income from bill payment, local government support, and additional voluntary payments in the billing process, and

WHEREAS, LIHEAP can come in several forms, including bill discounts, flexible billing terms (timing, debt forgiveness, predictive billing to avoid seasonal highs), lifeline rates, temporary assistance, and water efficiency assistance; and

WHEREAS, lower income communities are also disproportionately impacted by aging infrastructure, which often provides lower-quality safety for drinking water, and increases water wastage through leaky pipes, with resulting higher costs to lower income families; and

WHEREAS, this aging infrastructure includes many situations of apartment buildings and complexes lacking individual water metering, making it especially difficult for these families to monitor and manage their water usage, and which will require costly retrofits to address;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah urgently call for Congress to enact and fund a national water affordability program, modeled on the LIHEAP program for home heating assistance for low income families; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah urges Congress to adopt implementing legislation which includes tax credits, grants or other assistance for cities, multi-unit properties and individual homeowners to install water efficiency devices, and make plumbing system retrofits and water delivery pipe repair to abate water loss on both public and private water lines.