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**Auditor says program improvements would enable more utility payment assistance**

PORTLAND, OREGON – CITY HALL – Portland could reduce water shutoffs and assist more utility customers with payments by implementing program improvements, according to an audit released today by City Auditor Mary Hull Caballero.

The Water Bureau bills for water, sewer and stormwater services, and most residential customers pay quarterly. These bills can pose a hardship for customers with limited incomes, and some customers fall behind in their payments. The Bureau shuts off water to compel payment of delinquent bills. Some households have their water shut off repeatedly, and some for many days.

To help low-income customers pay their bills, the City introduced a discount program in 1995 and set a goal to enroll 10,000 customers. The goal has never been reached, and assistance is not available to residents of multifamily housing who are twice as likely to have incomes below the poverty level than residents of single-family housing.



Payment assistance programs should be grounded in an understanding of customers’ needs and should be tailored and regularly measured. The audit says the Bureau should collect and use data, improve outreach, and strengthen training. In addition, the Bureau should continue to study how to expand assistance to residents of multifamily housing.

Commissioner Nick Fish and Water Bureau Director Michael Stuhr submitted a written response to the audit, and it is included at the back of the report.

Report highlights: <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/auditservices/article/658744>

The full report: <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/auditservices/article/658743>

