

From: Kristin Bowling
To: [Merrell, Melissa](#); [Frost, Liam](#); [Huynh, Cecelia](#); [Commissioner Fish](#)
Subject: Public Comment: PUB meeting, Low Income Assistance
Date: Thursday, March 15, 2018 9:48:18 AM

Greetings:

I will not be able to attend the utility board meeting this morning, but would like to submit a public comment for the record on affordability.

While I appreciate the work that Mr. Frost is doing with the Low Income Assistance program (especially with multifamily billing structures) and his observation that Portland is on the forefront of providing assistance vs. other cities, I would point out that Portland's water rates being many times higher than other locales negates our city as being "progressive" on this issue in any way, shape, or form. Given the impact of our high rates across our community and the crazy structure of what is billed, I would argue we are instead regressive.

An example: my household with two wage earners recently received a quarterly bill of \$360, or \$120 per month. The cap for assistance is \$2500 for 2 people. At that rate, you expecting people to pay almost 5% of their earnings for one single utility bill. If all 4 of our other basic utilities (electric, gas, internet without cable, and telephone) were billed at that rate (and thank goodness they are all mostly half that amount), that would mean a household would spend 25% of its income on utilities alone. Add 33% for rent (which at \$2500/month is \$833, a run down studio apartment if you're lucky way out on Gresham city limits), and you're expecting a household to expend 58% of income on housing and basic utilities, a proportion that (excluding even other necessities like food, clothing, medical care, and transportation) is obviously not sustainable.

A closer examination of our bill reveals some of the problems. A full 39% of our last bill is stormwater fees, base charges, and superfund fees, which we cannot reduce with household consumption. All of these fees have gone up by about 10% in the last 6 months. In addition, I'm alarmed to see that a "utility license fee" is included in all of the fees-- adding paying police and firefighters, the highest paid bureaus in the city by a very wide margin-- from our already exorbitant water fees, a completely unacceptable practice from a bureau already raising rates on an annual basis.

This combination of conditions is unsustainable for EVERYONE at median income and below-- a household making \$50k would still be paying almost 4% of their income for one single utility at the current rate-- and you're planning to raise rates again this September, and every September after, right? No matter how generous your assistance may seem compared to other localities, again, this is not the case at all when our rates are ridiculously high compared to theirs.

You must stop 1) raising rates, and 2) including totally unrelated services in water bills, 3) raise the assistance threshold to the median household income or above, and 4) find other sources of funding for the bureau. (Police asked for \$2m just for bullets last year to practice with. Surely they have some money to share with the water bureau rather than the other way around.)

Thank you for submitting my comments into the public record of today's meeting, and sharing your response with me.

Kristin Bowling, MEd Portland, OR