

House Committee on Energy and Commerce Member Day Hearing 12/12/25

Testimony of Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib

Thank you to the Committee for the opportunity to share written testimony on two critical priorities under its jurisdiction. Water is life, and access to clean drinking water is a human right. I urge the Committee to prioritize lead service line replacement and water affordability measures in 2026 and beyond to make good on our duty to the American people to ensure everyone has the water they need to live.

Lead Service Line Replacement

There is no safe level of lead exposure. Millions of Americans are still drinking water with significant lead levels, and our children are particularly vulnerable. Our state and local governments do not have the resources and capacity to address this lead crisis without significant federal support.

Our work to rapidly replace every lead service line in America is reaching a critical moment. Updated estimates put the total cost of full lead service line replacement near \$75 billion, and while we have made some progress, at least \$60 billion more is urgently needed to finish the job. But instead of surging funding, Senate appropriators are actually proposing *cutting* \$250 million in lead service line replacement funding in the Senate Interior Appropriations bill. This is an outrage that must be defeated.

During this year's appropriations process, 65 Members signed onto a letter led by the Get The Lead Out Caucus supporting funding for lead service line removal, more than doubling the previous years' support. There is broad, bipartisan support throughout Congress for getting the lead out of our drinking water systems, and the time to act is now.

Moreover, the benefits of removing lead pipes and reducing lead levels in tap water significantly exceed the costs. These benefits include protecting about a million infants from low birthweight-related complications, preventing thousands of children from suffering from ADHD, and avoiding 1,500 fatal heart attacks. Reducing lead levels in tap water also will reduce the damage to Americans' kidneys and immune, reproductive, and nervous systems.

I urge the Committee to make lead service line replacement one of its highest priorities for 2026.

Water Affordability

The Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) created in 2021 was a lifeline for families that kept water flowing during the worst of the pandemic, but its funding has run out and families facing increasingly unaffordable water bills have few places to turn for help. The federal government must rapidly increase water assistance to households and public water utilities so that every low-income household has the safe, reliable water they need to live and thrive. Thousands of my Michigan families depend on water assistance, and thousands more are still waiting for help, as available support falls well short of the need.

Last year I introduced the Half-Century Update for Water Access and Affordability Act (H2O UP Act) to establish the first-ever permanent, federal low-income water affordability program at the EPA. This bill had the support of 20 original cosponsors, more than 40 national and regional organizations, and the Congressional Progressive Caucus. I will be reintroducing this bill in early 2026.

The H2O UP Act amends Part E of the Safe Drinking Water Act to establish the Low-Income Drinking Water Assistance Program within the EPA. The Program will include drinking water access financial assistance to low-income households, technical assistance for community water systems, and data collection and reporting. \$20 billion is appropriated annually for the next 10 years to carry out the Program. The Program will promote universal access to drinking water for all low-income households.

We have a federal assistance program for gas and electricity, but no permanent program for water. Our families can't live without access to water. Millions of our neighbors across the country have their water shut off simply because they cannot afford their rising bills. Safe, accessible, and affordable drinking water is essential to public health, and many water utilities cannot afford to maintain their infrastructure.

The H2O UP Act represents a much-needed commitment to addressing water affordability, a crisis that disproportionately impacts low-income and historically undervalued communities. This legislation tackles the water affordability crisis from multiple angles, ensuring households receive a water bill they can afford while also supporting water systems with the technical assistance and funding necessary to maintain safe, reliable service. Integral to the Act's success is the establishment of Community Advisory Committees, which provide local residents, nonprofits, and stakeholders a seat at the table to guide program implementation in each region.

The H2O UP Act makes meaningful steps towards addressing the water affordability crisis by pairing direct water bill assistance with systemic reforms that address the root causes of unaffordable water. This legislation is a comprehensive approach to ensuring safe and affordable water for all, now and in the future.

I look forward to working with the Committee to advance this legislation in 2026 and beyond.

Sincerely,



Rashida Tlaib
Michigan's 12th District