



NOBEL Women Resolution Supporting the Creation of Low-Income and Emergency Assistance Programs for Water and Wastewater Services

COMMITTEE: Health

RESOLUTION:HEA-20-09

1. **WHEREAS**, clean water and reliable wastewater services are essential utilities to which
2. every person must have ready and affordable access; and
3. **WHEREAS**, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturn have
4. highlighted affordability issues related to water and wastewater services. These
5. affordability issues disproportionately impact low-income households and communities
6. of color. For example, it has been estimated that low-income households spend an
7. average of 12.4% of their disposable income each month on water and sewer services.¹
8. African American job losses during the pandemic and economic downturn have greatly
9. outpaced other demographic groups. As of July 2020, the unemployment rate for African
10. Americans stood at 14.6%, further exacerbating longstanding and persistent Black
11. income and wealth gaps. As a result, these communities are most at risk of being unable
12. to pay for critical water and wastewater services; and
13. **WHEREAS**, the pandemic and economic downturn have impacted the finances of
14. municipal governments with local officials, on average, expecting a 13 percent decline in
15. general fund revenues² forcing many cities to severely cut services and layoff or furlough
16. employees; and
17. **WHEREAS**, state regulators and water service providers across the country have
18. deployed a range of solutions, including temporary moratoriums on utility service
19. disconnections, to ensure that every household continues to have access to essential water

¹ Manuel P. Teodoro & Robin Rose Saywitz, *Water and Sewer Affordability in the United States: A 2019 Update*, (April 14, 2020), <https://awwa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/aws2.1176>.

² *City Fiscal Conditions 2020*, National League of Cities, Aug. 2020, https://www.nlc.org/sites/default/files/users/user57221/City_Fiscal_Conditions_2020_FINAL.pdf.

20. and wastewater services during the pandemic; and

21. **WHEREAS**, these temporary solutions have benefited many and underscore the

22. importance of implementing permanent solutions to affordability issues. Long-term

23. moratoria on water and wastewater disconnections are unsustainable and unsuited for

24. addressing these challenges; and

25. **WHEREAS**, The National Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women (NOBEL

26. Women) passed RESOLUTION: ENE-17-02 which states, The National Organization of

27. Black Elected Legislative (NOBEL) Women reaffirms that clean, safe, reliable and

28. affordable water service is essential for our communities”³; and

29. **WHEREAS**, unlike for other utility services, there is a dearth of water and wastewater

30. affordability programs at the state and federal levels. Subsidies for electric and gas

31. service are available via the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program

32. (LIHEAP); and

33. **WHEREAS**, The National Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women (NOBEL

34. Women) signed on with the National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition (NEUAC)

and its national coalition of more than 200 member organizations representing thousands

of individuals, along with the hundreds of stakeholders on a letter to support LIHEA, to

strongly urge Congress to defend and improve LIHEAP funding in FY21 and;

35. **WHEREAS**, The National Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women (NOBEL

36. Women) has recognized that “even though the number of households eligible for the

37. LIHEAP program continues to exceed those receiving assistance, this funding has been a

38. lifeline...helping to ensure that people do not have to choose between paying their energy

39. bills and paying for food or medicine;” and

40. **WHEREAS**, many low-income programs do not contemplate national crises with

41. widespread economic consequences including high unemployment, therefore excluding

42. countless families that find themselves in need of assistance; and

43. **WHEREAS**, there is growing support for creating a low-income and emergency customer

³ Resolution ENE-17-02ETE-09-05 Promote Clean, Safe, Reliable Water Service, <http://nobel-women.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Resolution-Water-Infrastructure.docx.pdf>

44. assistance program for water and wastewater services provided by either municipal or

45. privately-owned utilities as a permanent solution to affordability challenges facing

46. consumers of these services. The National Association of Regulatory Utility

47. Commissioners (NARUC) and the National Association of State Utility Consumer

48. Advocates (NASUCA), among other organizations, have adopted resolutions calling for

49. the creation of such a program;⁴ and

50. **NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, The National Organization of Black Elected

51. Legislative Women (NOBEL Women) supports the creation of a low-income and

52. emergency customer assistance program for water and wastewater services, provided by

53. either municipal or privately-owned utilities, at the federal and state levels to ensure that

54. all households, regardless of race or income, are able to better afford water and

55. wastewater services; and

56. **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, The National Organization of Black Elected

57. Legislative Women (NOBEL Women) supports the allotment of federal funds allocated

58. for COVID-19 as part of the CARES Act to be used for water and wastewater customer

59. assistance programs; and

60. **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that copies of this Resolution be dispatched to the

61. President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, Members of

62. Congress, House and Senate Leadership, and other elected officials as appropriate.

**Introduced by: The Honorable Valencia Seay
Georgia General Assembly**

⁴⁴ *Resolution Recommending Federal Rate Relief Remedies for Low Income Water and Wastewater Customers Resulting from the COVID-19 Health Emergency*, National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC), July 2020, <https://pubs.naruc.org/pub/B28DF0A6-155D-0A36-3159-E406229FC71A#page=9>; *NASUCA Recommendations Concerning the Effects of the Public Health and Economic Crises Resulting from COVID-19 upon Utility Rates and Services Provided to Consumers by Public Utilities*, National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUCA), May 2020, <https://www.nasuca.org/nwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2020-01-NASUCA-COVID-19-Policy-Resolution-Final-5-12-20-.pdf>.