

July 17, 2014



The Honorable Michael Duggan
Mayor
City of Detroit
2 Woodward Avenue
Suite 116
Detroit, MI 48226

Mr. Kevyn D. Orr
Emergency Manager
City of Detroit
Office of the Emergency Manager
City of Detroit
2 Woodward Avenue
Suite 116
Detroit, MI 48226

Ms. Susan F. McCormick
Director
Detroit Water and Sewerage Department
735 Randolph Street
Detroit, MI 48226

Dear Mayor Duggan, Mr. Orr, and Ms. McCormick:

We are writing to you today as national religious leaders representing over 180,000 congregants, members, and supporters who are concerned about the distressing results of the mass water shutoffs announced by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department. The shutoffs have had and will have very serious impacts on Detroit's lowest-income residents. We respectfully urge you to consider immediately restoring water service to households most at risk and to impose a moratorium on residential water shutoffs until effective measures to protect human health and families are in place in Detroit.

The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department issued a press release on June 25 reporting that 46,000 shutoff notices were sent in the month of May, with over 4,000 of those executed. The number of residents affected was not reported, but the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization has evidence that it may be 3,000 households per week. There are few protections for infants and children under six years old, low-income elders, chronically ill individuals, or disabled people, including military veterans. In addition to jeopardizing residents' health, these shutoffs threaten family integrity, as Child Protective Services responds to homes that no longer have access to water and sanitation. We are deeply troubled by the implications this decision has for family life in Detroit.

We urge you to take immediate steps to protect residents' health and families by ensuring that the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department and other agencies take the following steps:

- Put into place robust administrative procedures to expedite and allow hundreds of residential accounts to make payment plans.
- When and where payment plans are not manageable for Detroit households living in poverty, establish measures for rescheduling the debt within families' means. Low-income residents should pay a maximum of 10 percent of the current account due, or less, depending on household income. In no case should payment exceed 2.5 percent of monthly household income for households living in poverty.
- Waive the required medical certification by a health-care provider for the medical emergency exemption. Residents may not yet be covered by health care, and scheduling appointments with providers will unnecessarily delay and put families at further risk.

- Take concrete action to ensure Michigan Child Protective Services carefully investigates each case before terminating parental custodial care on a water shutoff notice without other evidence of imminent harm to the child. We must give parents and guardians time and support to make alternative arrangements.
- Establish clear policies that prohibit water shutoffs to households where there are children under six years of age, low-income seniors, chronically ill individuals, and people with disabilities — neighbors for whom a water shutoff poses an extraordinary burden.
- Establish affordability guidelines that ensure residents are not forced to give up food, medicine, or shelter by having to pay water bills in lieu of buying essential goods or paying rent. In no case should a home be foreclosed for liens against the property from unpaid water service debt. Residents should not jeopardize telecommunications in order to pay their water bills. Being able to call upon emergency services (police, fire department, and ambulance) and be in communication with schools, work, and medical providers is an essential part of modern life, particularly when alternatives such as public telephones are not available.

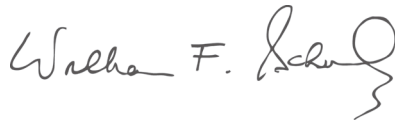
Our faith tradition calls us to honor the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. We understand that we all have a most basic human right to water in order to preserve health, families, and dignity.

Thank you for your kind attention to this request. We will look forward to your response and to working with you in any way we can to support an alternative path forward in the great city of Detroit.

Respectfully yours,



Rev. Peter Morales,
President, Unitarian Universalist Association



Rev. Dr. William F. Schulz,
President and CEO, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee