

**CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 17-0015R
(Resolution)**

Introduced by: President Young, Councilmembers Stokes, Middleton, Scott, Costello, Burnett,
Bullock, Dorsey, Henry, Cohen, Sneed, Schleifer, Reisinger

Introduced and read first time: March 6, 2017

Assigned to: Judiciary and Legislative Investigations Committee

REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: Department of Public Works, Department of Finance

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **Investigative Hearing – Water Billing**

3 FOR the purpose of requesting that the Department of Public Works and the Department of
4 Finance brief the City Council on water affordability for customers of Baltimore’s Bureau of
5 Water and Wastewater, the new water billing system started in October 2016, and concerns
6 raised by customers of the Bureau of Water and Wastewater regarding unusually high bills,
7 missing bills, and the process to contest bills.

8 **Recitals**

9 In October 2016, the Department of Public Works’ Bureau of Water and Wastewater
10 implemented a monthly water billing system. As customers of the City’s Bureau of Water and
11 Wastewater participate in this program, many concerns have been raised.

12 The system has worked well for many customers, but others have seen unusually high bills,
13 bills coming at seemingly random intervals, or obviously mistaken bills. It is not clear how
14 common these billing errors are, but some that have occurred have been widely publicized and
15 discussed, leading to questions about the accuracy and reliability of the new system even among
16 customers who would not otherwise have reason to doubt their bills. Coming so soon after the
17 introduction of a new system advertised as the solution to Baltimore’s longstanding water billing
18 problems, these issues need to be publically acknowledged and addressed to enable customers to
19 trust that the system can be relied on to issue bills that are fair, accurate, and timely.

20 The changes to the process to contest water bills, implemented at the same time as the
21 changes to the water billing system, have exacerbated concerns about the fairness of the new
22 billing approach. DPW’s decision to create a more formal, and form driven, process for
23 contesting bills included the elimination of any opportunity for customers and their advocates to
24 have in-person discussions about billing issues. Advocates assert that this change has stripped
25 City water customers of a fair process to contest their bills. A failure to adequately publicize this
26 change has certainly added to confusion about the new bills and how to rectify problems that
27 arise with them.

28 In order to reassure Baltimoreans that they have a fair and reliable water billing system, it is
29 critical that DPW take a hard look at all of these changes and reassess the rationale for them and
30 the effects they have had as a package on City water customers. Where mistakes have been

EXPLANATION: Underlining indicates matter added by amendment.
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter deleted by amendment.

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1 made, they need to be admitted and addressed; and where improvements can be made, they need
2 to be attended to immediately. Only a thorough public discussion about what has gone right and
3 wrong with the new system, and how DPW is working to ensure that problems with the new
4 systems are cured, can hope to convince customers that their water bills can finally be trusted.

5 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That the
6 Council requests that the Department of Public Works and the Department of Finance brief it on
7 water affordability for customers of Baltimore's Bureau of Water and Wastewater, the new water
8 billing system started in October 2016, and concerns raised by customers of the Bureau of Water
9 and Wastewater regarding unusually high bills, missing bills, and the process to contest bills.

10 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the
11 Director of Public Works, the Finance Director, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City
12 Council.