



<b>F R O M</b>	Name & Title	Letitia Dzirasa, M.D., Commissioner 	Health Department  AGENCY REPORT	
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	Subject: Position:	CC #18-0307 FAVORABLE		

To: President and Members  
of the City Council  
c/o 409 City Hall

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The Baltimore City Health Department (“BCHD”) is pleased to have the opportunity to review City Council Bill #19-0307, entitled “Water Accountability and Equity Act.” This legislation specifies when water supplies may be cut-off, institutes a revised system for entering a payment plan, establishes a water affordability program for those below a certain income threshold, and streamlines the process for water bill dispute resolution by creating the Office of Water-Customer Advocacy and Appeals.

From the perspective of BCHD, there are several potentially positive programmatic and social impacts. BCHD’s Division of Aging is the designated Area Agency on Aging for the City of Baltimore. As the Area Agency on Aging, the Division’s mission is to act as an advocate for older adults in the City, enabling them to continue to live independently and with dignity in their homes and communities.

The Division is hearing more and more from low income Baltimore City seniors who cannot afford the rising cost of water. Older adults who are not able to pay for water find that their financial, health, and family problems are compounded. The inability to pay can also jeopardize older adults’ ownership of their only major asset, their homes. In some cases, those who cannot pay their water bills end up in tax sale. Our agency has firsthand experience with this latter group; as the Area Agency on Aging, the Division is mandated by State law to assist seniors notified of a pending tax sale each spring.

When seniors contact the City to ask for help with water bill-related issues, specifically requests for financial aid or assistance navigating the water bill process, they often receive an indifferent or confusing response. The new Water-for-All Discount Program, to be created by Council Bill #18-0307, will provide a much-needed resource for older adults who are unable to pay their water bills. Moreover, the bill’s Office of Water-Customer Advocacy and Appeals will give these vulnerable adults a mechanism for resolving disputes, and an advocate when they have billing discrepancies.

For the foregoing reasons, the Baltimore City Health Department strongly urges a **favorable report** on Council Bill #18-0307.