



Shammas Malik, Mayor

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Chairwoman O'Brien, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member DeMora, and members of the Senate Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong opposition to HB 93.

As Mayor of the city of Akron, I write to you to strongly oppose HB 93 and the detrimental impact it will have on the City of Akron and the numerous neighboring communities we serve across Summit County. HB 93 would make tenants responsible for unpaid utility bills, as opposed to the property owner/landlord. As you know, cities are not aware of the private contract negotiations between landlords and tenants and thus do not have the information needed to track tenants once they have left the property for unpaid bills.

Accordingly, HB 93 will result in extensive operational cost increases and lost revenue causing a significant financial burden to our entire customer base. These new costs would likely require additional water rate increases to our entire service population within Summit and Portage County including the communities of Hudson, Fairlawn, Stow, Tallmadge, Mogadore and many rural townships. This would come at a time when families most especially in Akron are hurting with already high utility rates, rising costs of groceries and many other household day-to-day necessities.

The City of Akron currently has a fair and equitable process which intends to support both our tenants and landlords. In an effort to minimize the burden the responsibility of the utility bill may have on a landlord, Akron offers numerous tenant and landlord friendly programs including:

- A water affordability program which provides a 40% discount to tenants who meet HEAP eligibility requirements. Tenants who receive this benefit are more likely to afford the services and less likely to run up high unpaid balances.
- An Akron Cares Program funded by private donations and other unique methods providing direct financial support to tenants who cannot pay their utility bills.
- A Utility Bill Relief Program which forgives unforeseen spiked bills associated with leaks and burst pipes.
- Payment Arrangement programs for tenants including loans for unpaid balances with landlord's consent.
- An Advanced Water Meter Network which provides real time water use monitoring of properties providing quick notification to tenants and owners when unusual continues running water, leaks and burst pipes is identified.
- A termination of water service process for unpaid balances as low as \$105. This amount is nearly the average of 1 month's typical billing for water, sewer and refuse. This low amount encourages tenants to pay their bills on time attempting to avoid tenants running up significant balances over long periods of time.

HB 93 makes a number of unnecessary, burdensome, and inequitable changes to well established utility billing and service practices, while at the same time creating new, onerous requirements. This bill would

effectively prevent cities from efficiently transferring delinquent balances and collecting the same from individuals so long as new utility accounts were opened by spouses, dependents, or other cohabitants. While we are proud of the services we provide, including our award-winning drinking water system, it is impossible to provide safe, reliable, and affordable services to our residents, businesses, and other customers if we cannot recover unpaid utility bills and cannot efficiently manage our utility.

At a time where residents of the city of Akron are dealing with increased prices and the overall cost of living is going up, now is not the time to risk an increase to a critical city service and to make it harder for cities to help their residents. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Shammas Malik
Mayor, City of Akron