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COVID-19 Spread Prompts Calls for Gov. Whitmer to Ensure Sanitation for All

Public water stations and urgent moves to restore water service are crucial

DETROIT – To protect public health during the COVID-19 outbreak, Metro Detroiters held a press conference Friday morning to call on Governor Gretchen Whitmer to establish public hand washing stations because of the slow pace of returning water service to households deprived. Thousands of residents who are homeless or can't afford their water bills are still at high risk of contracting and spreading coronavirus because they lack access to crucial sanitation. Advocates pointed to the need to reduce health risks by installing public sanitation stations and by working to speed up the pace of water service restoration the Governor facilitated on March 9.

"We are sure the Governor acted in good faith to get water service restored to the more than 9,000 households that couldn't afford their water bills and were cut off," said **Sylvia Orduño** of **People's Water Board Coalition.** "But the hard reality is the longer more people are without access to clean water, the bigger the public health risk. We need more resources on the ground to expedite the process of getting water to thousands of households and tens of thousands of people."

The People's Water Board Coalition had to cancel plans to gather in Lansing to commemorate World Water Day by educating elected officials on the need to revive and pass legislation that makes water affordable for all. Had the lawmakers enacted the "Water as Human Right" bill package sponsored by Senator Stephanie Chang and others, everyone would have access to water and the threat of coronavirus and other diseases would be far less. In lieu of that legislation and in light of declared State of Emergency, the Coalition and supporters are calling for Governor Whitmer to step in.

“The first thing any public health expert recommends in dealing with this pandemic is washing one’s hands. That’s simple for most, but impossible for those who don’t have access to water. We need Governor Whitmer to move resources to change that,” said **Dr. Paul von Oeyen**, **a retired physician**. “The public health impacts of shutting off water to households are vast and devastating and the COVID-19 pandemic is only exacerbating the problem. We need elected officials to act now to get water to everyone as soon as humanly possible.”

Detroit resident Nicole Hill has experienced Department of Water and Sewerage Department shutoffs several times in recent years. She says her family has been unable to keep up with the growing cost of service and she knows many households with similar struggles. “My family has had health issues not only from a lack of or limited drinking water but from a lack of eating adequately,” she said. “For instance, when my water is shutoff, I don’t cook rice or beans. What we need, especially in light of this current coronavirus crisis is clean, accessible, affordable water and sanitation services restored for all low-income residents.”

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People’s Water Board Coalition’s letter to Governor Whitmer is attached to this release.