

October 7, 2022

Mr. Jeffrey R. Gaudiosi, Esq.  
Executive Secretary  
Public Utilities Regulatory Authority  
10 Franklin Square  
New Britain, Connecticut 06051

Re: Application of Aquarion Water Company of Connecticut to Amend Its Rate Schedule  
(Docket No. 22-07-01)

Dear Mr. Gaudiosi,

I write to oppose Aquarion's proposed amended rate schedule that would raise consumers' rates a staggering 25 percent over the next three years. This year alone, consumers are already facing higher costs for gasoline and heating as well as food and other necessities. The Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) should reject this proposed rate schedule or any amended rate schedule that would unduly add to the burdens consumers are facing.

Under this proposed rate filing, Aquarion is preparing to increase its rates by approximately 13.9 percent starting next February, 6.9 percent the next year, and another 4.2 the following year – all total, that is a 25 percent increase in rates in just three years.

Water is an essential resource, like food or shelter. Yet, significant increases in water rates could result in substantial limits on consumers' water use. As proposed, the amended rate schedule would negatively affect all Connecticut Aquarion consumers but would have a disproportionate impact on our state's most vulnerable residents, including senior citizens, individuals with disabilities, and low- and middle-income households

Aquarion states that it needs this rate readjustment to recover the costs from the more than \$760 million it has invested in water utility infrastructure since 2013, when its rates were last reviewed. I appreciate these investments but reject the notion the company can just turn around and raise consumer rates to recoup these costs. Rather, PURA should closely scrutinize these investments and ensure their prudence – and then determine an amended rate schedule that fairly distributes costs for prudent investments across consumers and Aquarion investors.

Aquarion is a subsidiary of Eversource – New England's largest utility – which purchased Aquarion in 2017 for \$1.6 billion. Since then, Aquarion has purchased five other water companies, including New England Service Company, and plans to acquire Torrington Water Company. Eversource recently reported profits of \$735 million for the first half of the

current fiscal year, an increase of almost 17 percent. Its water unit, which includes Aquarion, raked in \$12.7 million in profits in the first half of the fiscal year.

In addition, Aquarion argues the proposed rate schedule is necessary to realign rates to equalize costs for consumers receiving water across the state. I agree that consumers should not be charged differently for the same service. However, I am not convinced that Aquarion's proposed rates achieve this aim.

Aquarion notes it will design rates and create other initiatives to assist vulnerable customers, like expanding its Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program to provide bill discounts to eligible customers. But simply expanding this program does not mitigate the harms of the increased rates. Similarly, Aquarion has said that more efficient customers will see smaller increases; this unfairly penalizes large households. It is imperative that PURA thoroughly evaluates Aquarion's proposed programs and incentives to ensure consumers see equitable cost distributions and actually receives the benefits of proposed programs.

Furthermore, Aquarion has touted its high customer service satisfaction and commitment to maintaining it. I support this commitment and urge Aquarion to ensure it provides easy-to-understand bills to consumers and has responsive representatives. PURA should consider requiring continued enhancement of customer support as a condition of granting any rate increase.

I appreciate your consideration of my concerns. I look forward to ensuring that consumer and ratepayer interests in affordable, reliable water services are protected.

Sincerely,



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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senate