

The Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) Establishment Act

Background:

In the U.S., the majority of funding for water system upgrades comes directly from local ratepayers. As the need to repair or replace existing infrastructure increases, ratepayers will be forced to cover the bulk of these costs to keep systems safe and reliable.

Problem:

Today, more than 1 in 3 Americans struggle to pay their water bills, which include these upgrade costs.¹ The need to repair or replace aging water infrastructure has increased significantly over the last decade, causing household water and wastewater bills to rise by more than 50 percent—faster than inflation, medical bills, or electricity bills.² Failing to upgrade our aging pipes and systems can lead to frequent service disruptions, contaminated waterways, and serious health risks from diseases.

Solution:

Ensuring all households stay connected to clean and dependable water services is necessary to protect public health and safety. Providing federal assistance for struggling households to stay current on their monthly water bills both protects communities and ensures utilities can make the investments necessary to maintain their systems long term.

The Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) is a national water assistance program that ensures all households can afford their water bills, allowing utilities to make system upgrades as needed. LIHWAP is modeled off the very successful Low-Income Household Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) program, which provides block grants to states to ensure low income and vulnerable populations do not lose access to heating and cooling during the year.

LIHWAP Establishment Act would:

- **Establish a national water assistance program:** Directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to authorize grants to States, Territories, and Tribes to assist low-income households in paying their drinking water or wastewater bills.
- **Aligns eligibility with existing programs:** Uses the same consistent income eligibility requirements as LIHEAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Supplemental Security Income, and means-tested veterans' programs.
- **Technical assistance:** Provides technical support to small, rural, and Tribal water systems.

¹ "American Water Works Association - Wave 5." ASDWA, May 1, 2024. <https://www.awwa.org/wp-content/uploads/Public-Perceptions-of-Tap-Water-Survey-24-Slides.pdf>.

² "Typical Household Water, Sewer Bills Increased 56% since 2012." WaterWorld, December 5, 2023. <https://www.waterworld.com/water-utility-management/press-release/14302301/typical-household-water-sewer-bills-increased-56-since-2012>.