



Executive Committee

June 9, 2020

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Executive Director

Jessica Dandridge

On Wednesday, June 3, 2020, Sewerage & Water Board (S&WB) formally announced their Customer Care Pay Plan. I am extremely delighted to know that S&WB moved forward to take active steps to protect resident's access to water during the Covid19 pandemic. More so, I am beyond excited that they have taken the first step to proactively support residents by creating a much-needed payment plan for those who are behind on their water utility bills. New Orleans residents pay some of the highest utility bills in the United States, paying upwards of \$1000 a year for drinking water, sewage, and drainage services. Additionally, every 1 in 6 homes experiences a water shut-off annually because they simply cannot afford to pay their bills.

The new Customer Care Pay Plan will give many residents suffering the impacts of Covid-19 a much needed financial relief. Prior to the start of Covid-19, 25,465 delinquencies and 5,707 disconnections were reported in February 2020 by the Sewerage and Water Board. The State now expects the Orleans Parish unemployment rate to balloon from impacts on the hospitality and tourism industries. This puts Orleans Parish and surrounding parishes at considerable risk for water shutoffs, impacting individual safety and stressing public health sectors across the state. The New Customer Care Pay Plan will help low families and individuals, the elderly, and those suffering from health risks meet their needs without the fear of losing water in their homes. This is something I believe was long overdue and extremely needed in a city with a considerable amount of residents living at or below the poverty line.

I personally would like to thank Executive Director Ghassan Korban, Director of Communications and Public Relations Richard Rainey and his team, and Mayor Latoya Cantrell for their continued dedication to the people of New Orleans. This plan shows true empathy and intentionality regarding equality of access and affordability. It demonstrates a new wave of leadership unseen for many decades of S&WB that hears and acts to meet residents where they are. While we understand that not all problems can be fixed overnight, this is a healthy step forward for our city to cultivate more transparent and customer friendly relations. I also recognize the heavy load we have ahead of us. The reality is that the Sewerage and Water Board has been neglected for decades, causing the erosion of its infrastructure and simultaneously public trust. With the installation of new leadership, the Band-Aid was ripped off to reveal unfortunate truths about our city's grey infrastructure, creating waves of painful and difficult conversations.

I personally ask S&WB leadership to continue pushing forward. Continue to actively listen to residents, to constructively review in house policies and procedures, become vehicles for innovation, and remove antiquated approaches, all while increasing transparency and building public trust. As the new Customer Care Plan rolls out, I personally will continue to monitor the progress and challenges of the program.



I will offer constructive feedback when needed and grace when warranted. Over time, I hope this plan becomes permanent, so that all residents can afford to pay their utilities during difficult times regardless of the event or circumstance without such huge burdens. I hope customer service and billing is strengthened, and the staff members in those departments become empowered to meet people with kindness and understanding.

The Water Collaborative is dedicated to both residents and our water utility. We are here to help communicate residential needs while creating bridges of understanding. The years ahead will be difficult and shaky as we continue to make hard decisions about our water management solutions that often go against our traditions and beloved culture. The key to success is to understand that the road ahead is long and filled with uncertainty. When we embrace challenges as a community instead of ignoring them, we provide future generations with new opportunities to love New Orleans as we have. Together, we can cross-pollinate new ideas for a brighter and stronger City.

[You can find the official Sewerage and Water Board Press Release here.](#) Below I have highlighted some of the many aspects of the new Customer Care Pay Plan.

- Water Moratorium will end on July 20th 2020. If a customer is on the CCP and making their payments, they will not be subjected to shutoffs. Disconnections would only impact those customers who move into delinquency going forward or break the terms of their plans. And even then, disconnections would be a course of last resort.
- Late fees on bills will go into effect after June 1st only. No previous late payments will incur fees.
- Customers with past due bills will be contacted by S&WB about their plans starting in June. Residents already behind on their bills will automatically be placed on the plan starting in July 2020. This plan includes no late fees or penalties when residents pay on time and will not be shorter than 6 months.
- Residents will pay a percentage of their past due bills on top of their regular bills, but the payment plans will start well before the restart of our regular collections processes to give customers a grace period to prepare and ask questions.
- The percentage of repayment will not exceed \$100 and will often be far less than to ensure affordability. For residents impacted by Covid-19, payments will be split evenly among their monthly bills. Plans can also be negotiated through the customer service department. For every six months if residents consistently make on time payments, they will remove \$50 in already-paid late fees from their outstanding balances.
- Customers who presently owe more than \$3,600 will be eligible for a 75-percent reduction of their remaining balance if they do not miss a full payment during their three-year (36-month) payment plan.
- Commercial accounts with outstanding balances up to \$4,800 will be placed into special payment plans. Commercial plans will not exceed \$200 a month or much less on top of their regular bills and will not incur late fees when payments are made in full. Commercial accounts will have between 6 months to 2 years to pay down their balances.

Executive Director  
Jessica Dandridge

Water Collaborative of Greater New Orleans

Handwritten signature of Jessica Dandridge.