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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT AND CITY COMPTROLLER ANNOUNCE \$8.9 MILLION IN DEBT FORGIVENESS FROM UTILITY BILLING RELIEF PROGRAM**

*Program launched in April has already cut water utility bills in half for over 8,500 Chicagoans and set them on the path towards debt forgiveness*

CHICAGO – Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and the Department of Finance Comptroller Reshma Soni today announced that the City has set aside \$8.9 million in potential debt forgiveness for eligible homeowners enrolled in the Chicago Utility Billing Relief (UBR) Program, a debt relief initiative that reduces the cost of water, sewer, and water-sewer tax portions of City utility bills for low-income Chicago residents. Launched in April 2020, the City has already cut in half the water utility bills for 8,539 UBR participants, and the City anticipates setting aside more forgivable utility debt in 2021 as more qualified customers sign up for the program. Additionally, UBR Program enrollees are eligible for total debt forgiveness on their past due balance – an important step in helping residents with a viable plan to resolve their overdue bills.

“Dismantling the historically regressive fines and fees practices that have crippled many of our communities has been a top priority of my administration from day one, and the economic pressures created by COVID-19 have only compounded the need for programs like UBR to help struggling families trying to make ends meet,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “Utility billing relief and other financial reforms we’ve rolled out since I came into office give the tens of thousands of Chicago residents who accumulate debt each year a pathway into compliance and are part of our broader effort to ensure we are creating equitable policies that work for all Chicagoans.”

The UBR program provides low-income residents with a 50 percent reduced rate on their water, sewer, and water-sewer taxes, as well as debt forgiveness on their outstanding utility balance for those who pay the reduced rate for one year. Over the course of the year, customers are not required to make any payments on their set aside balance and collection and shut-off activity is suspended during enrollment. Since implementation in April, UBR enrollees have averaged \$1,044 in outstanding utility debt set aside.



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While working in partnership with CEDA of Cook County, who operates the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), the City has engaged in an extensive public education campaign to enroll homeowners who meet program qualifications. By leveraging the expertise and experience of CEDA and tapping into its vast network of partner organizations, the City has been able to expand its reach to connect with more income-eligible residents.

“COVID has further exposed families, especially those from low-income communities, with enormous financial challenges that oftentimes include excessive debt,” said Comptroller Soni. “A debt forgiveness program like UBR can make a huge difference for a family in need which is why the City has been aggressively working to build program awareness using social media, digital billboards, webinars and workshops held with Aldermen at Ward offices and other forms of engagement in order to offer financial relief to as many eligible homeowners as possible.”

Once enrolled in the UBR Program, eligible low-income homeowners receive:

- A 50 percent reduced rate on water, sewer, and water-sewer tax;
- No late payment penalties or debt collection activity; and,
- Debt forgiveness after successfully completing one year with no past due balance.

Participants who meet the following eligibility criteria can participate in the UBR Program:

- Must reside in the City of Chicago; in keeping with the Welcoming Cities Ordinance, undocumented residents are eligible;
- Must be a homeowner who resides in a single-family home or two-flat;
- Homeowner’s name must appear on the utility bill; and,
- Income must be at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, i.e., the 30-day income for a family of four cannot exceed \$4,367.

Low-income homeowners are encouraged to check their eligibility at [www.chicago.gov/ubr](http://www.chicago.gov/ubr) and follow the prompts to complete the income verification process. Residents can also contact the City’s Utility Billing & Customer Service Center at 312-744-4426 or [utilitybill@cityofchicago.org](mailto:utilitybill@cityofchicago.org) to learn more.

The UBR Program is part of a series of reforms pursued by Mayor Lightfoot and the City Council to address regressive fines, fees and billing practices that have disproportionately created hardships for vulnerable residents. These reforms have included eliminating City sticker ticket debt for those who can least afford it, reduction of excessive late fees on the City Sticker program, elimination of license suspensions for non-driving violations, launch of a series of new payment plans that expand the options for paying off debt, and new pathways to compliance to help



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residents who are eligible to avoid any number of the devastating consequences of onerous city debt – including water shut offs, tow and impound, and more.

Residents who do not qualify for the UBR Program may be eligible for a Senior Citizen Sewer Exemption. This program grants a sewer charge and sewer tax exemption to seniors aged 65 or over who own and occupy their own residence. The property must have a separate metered water service or a separate city water assessment. Seniors who do not qualify for the exemption because they own and occupy a townhome, condominium unit, or cooperative unit with a shared water service or assessment may qualify for the Senior Citizen Sewer Rebate. Seniors eligible for the rebate can apply to receive a \$50 rebate annually.

Additionally, for those who do not qualify for the UBR program, the City offers several utility bill payment plans for residents to choose from, including a 6-, 12-, 18-, 24-, or 36-month payment plan, which are accessible online or by phone. For more information about the Senior Citizen Sewer Exemption, contact at 312-744-4426 or [utilitybill@cityofchicago.org](mailto:utilitybill@cityofchicago.org) to learn more.

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