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CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

press@cityofchicago.org

MAYOR LIGHTFOOT INTRODUCES ORDINANCE TO ENHANCE WATER AFFORDABILITY & ANNOUNCES WATER ASSISTANCE FUNDS

Ordinance restarts the MeterSave Program, prevents future privatization of the water system, and codifies the end of water shut-offs for non-payment.

CHICAGO – Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot, the Department of Water Management (DWM), and the Department of Finance today announced critical ordinance enhancements and investments to increase water affordability for residents. Today, an ordinance was introduced at City Council to restart the MeterSave water meter installation program, prevent future privatization of the water system, and codify the end of water shutoffs for non-payment. Mayor Lightfoot also encouraged Chicagoans to apply for water bill relief through the state/federal Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP), in addition to the City's existing Utility Billing Relief (UBR) program. These measures are part of the Mayor's commitment to addressing water affordability and improving municipal services citywide.

"No one in the City of Chicago should go without clean water simply because they cannot afford it," said Mayor Lightfoot. "That's why providing access to affordable water is and will always be one of the City's most essential services. Today, we are taking a huge step forward in not only lowering the cost of water but also ensuring that we are preserving its affordability for years to come."

"For nonmetered Chicago households, our ability to safely restart MeterSave is one of the best ways to ensure affordable water service," said Dr. Andrea Cheng, Commissioner of the Department of Water Management (DWM). "Based on recent study results, we can confidently restart the program with new modifications that will protect health and safety."

The MeterSave Program, which began in 2009, offers residents a free water meter, installation, a seven-year guarantee that their bill won't be higher than it was without a meter, and water conservation kits. Water meters measure the amount of water a residence uses and bills the resident accordingly, resulting in substantial savings on water bills for most households. Over 130,000 meters have been installed through the program, and residents saw an average savings of over 50%



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upon switching to a meter. The program was paused out of an abundance of caution in 2019 due to preliminary results from a study that showed a slight elevation in water lead levels in some homes after meter installation.

Following the pause of the MeterSave Program, DWM launched another study to investigate whether a different type of meter or other measures might reduce or eliminate the impact on residential lead levels post-installation. Based on results from that study, the City plans to resume the program with new modifications that will protect the health and safety of residents. After the resumption of the program, prolonged flushing of water will be performed by the meter installation crew after they put the meter in place. Restarting this program allows DWM to provide the most affordable water service to nonmetered households.

For information on how to sign-up for a water meter, visit metersave.org and follow the instructions for registration. DWM will be contacting those who have previously registered for a meter to confirm interest. Priority will be given to those already on the waiting list with a focus on residents in communities with high water debt burden, and in households with high water bill debt.

In addition to restarting the MeterSave Program, the ordinances introduced by Mayor Lightfoot prohibit the future privatization of the water system to ensure long-term affordability. The ordinance also permanently codifies the end of water shutoffs due to non-payment, which Mayor Lightfoot implemented as a practice in May of 2019.

These ordinances ensure that the City preserves water affordability for years to come, and build on the success of water affordability programs already in place, such as the Utility Billing Relief (UBR) Program. To date, the program has seen over 20,000 enrollments with 93% of enrollees successfully completing the program, over \$11.5 million in debt forgiven, and over \$9.8 million in savings through rate reductions. Homeowners of single-family homes and 2-flats who reside at the property and meet the income guidelines - generally 200% of the Federal Poverty Line or less - are eligible. Learn more about the program and apply at Chicago.gov/UBR.

Additionally, Mayor Lightfoot and the Department of Finance announced that eligible Chicago residents can also apply for another source of water bill assistance—the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP). This is a federally funded program, administered by the State of Illinois, to assist low-income households with paying their past-due water and wastewater (sewer) bills. Chicago residents living in any type of residential property are eligible to apply if they have a past due water bill balance of \$250 or greater. The income guideline for



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LIHWAP is also generally 200% of the Federal Poverty Line or less. The amount of assistance per household in Chicago for the LIHWAP program ranges between \$250 to \$1,500. Chicago residents can apply for both UBR and LIHWAP simultaneously through CEDA.

Additionally, customers already in UBR who may have encountered an issue affording their reduced rate bills during their UBR program year can apply for LIHWAP assistance. LIHWAP assistance could help a UBR customer become current on their utility bill prior to the end of their UBR program year, enabling them to achieve full debt forgiveness. The City of Chicago and CEDA are reaching out to UBR customers who may be eligible for this type of assistance.

"UBR has helped so many Chicago homeowners become more financially secure by providing them with a path to debt relief for their utility accounts," said Comptroller Reshma Soni. "We are excited that LIHWAP will provide additional relief to those residents that need it most."

The Community and Economic Development Association of Cook County (CEDA) is the agency administering LIHWAP. Visit www.cedaorg.net or call 1-800-571-2332 to learn more and apply to LIHWAP and other CEDA programs, including gas and electric bill assistance such as LIHEAP.

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