

SUBSTITUTE NO. 1 TO ORD. NO. 23-034

AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND CHAPTER 45 TO EXEMPT ELDERLY AND DISABLED RESIDENTS AND RESIDENCES WITH CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF FIVE FROM WATER SERVICE DISCONNECTION FOR NONPAYMENT OF UTILITY CHARGES

Rev. 1

#0344

Sponsor:

**Council
Member
Darby**

WHEREAS, every resident of the City of Wilmington, regardless of where they live, race, or class, should have access to clean and safe water; and

WHEREAS, no one should fear that their water will be shut off at any time, but especially during a time when hand-washing and practicing proper hygiene is critical to prevent the spread of a deadly illness; and

WHEREAS, the City is slowly coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, fixed, low-, and moderate-income families nevertheless continue to face financial challenges; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Ord. 23-019, City Council established a Water Utility Assistance Program, which does not begin until July 1, 2024; and

WHEREAS, in the interim, and beyond, the City should not wield the power to turn off water to its most vulnerable populations; and

WHEREAS, City Council deems it necessary to protect the City's most vulnerable populations from water shutoffs.

**NOW, THEREFORE, THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF WILMINGTON
HEREBY ORDAINS:**

SECTION 1. Section 45-171 of the Wilmington City Code is hereby amended with the addition of the underlined language to read as follows:

Sec. 45-171. - When facilities charge payable; effect of nonpayment.

a) Beginning July 1, 1983, the facilities charge for water furnished by

meter measurements shall be payable to the department of finance, in advance on or before the billing due date. If, after the billing due date, the whole or any portion thereof remains unpaid, the account shall be deemed delinquent and subject to the penalty and interest charges provided in this division. If the whole or any portion thereof remains unpaid 30 days after the billing due date, the water may be shut off and the water shall not again be supplied or furnished to such premises except upon payment of all water rent due the city, including turn-off and turn-on charges, together with penalties, interest and costs as provided in this division.

b) Premises shall be exempt from the shutoff provision of subsection (a) of this section when the residents of the premises include any or all of the following:

i) Elderly people over the age of 65;

ii) disabled people who meet the eligibility requirements for being disabled; and/or

iii) residences with children under the age of five (5).

c) Application; affidavit. Application for such exemption must be made by the customer or resident of the premises on forms to be furnished by the city's department of finance. The customer or resident of the premises shall furnish the information to be executed in the manner required on such forms, and such forms and information shall be filed with the city's department of finance.

- i) Customers or residents of the premises who qualify under the disability section shall be required to file a copy of a state, employer, or doctor's determination of disability with the department of finance, although all other conditions of the exemption still apply.
- ii) Customers or residents of the premises who qualify as a residence with a child under the age of five shall be required to file proof that the child(ren) reside at the service address of the account holder.
- iii) Customers or residents of the premises who have been granted exemptions from municipal taxation of real property under Sec. 44-64, shall not be required to submit an application for exemption under this section.
- iv) Making a false written statement on any such application shall constitute the misdemeanor of making a false written statement and the application form shall bear such warning. The department of finance shall process each such application and such supporting documentation as it deems necessary and shall grant or deny the exemption.
- v) Rules and regulations. The city's finance director may promulgate such rules and regulations and prescribe such forms as they shall deem necessary to implement this section.

- d) Notice of availability. The city’s finance director shall cause notice of this exemption to be distributed to all customers by publishing eligibility information on the City’s website, in monthly billing statements, and including information in customer service scripts used by call center employees.
- e) Past due notice. Any past due notice sent to a customer by the Department of Finance shall include notice in at least English and Spanish which provides information on:
 - i) The availability of payment assistance programs; and
 - ii) Information on eligibility for payment assistance programs and the process to apply to each payment assistance program.
- f) Reporting. The Department of Finance shall report annually to Council the number of customers, by zip code and customer class:
 - i) that are in arrears; and
 - ii) that have received shut-off notices; and
 - iii) that have entered payment plans; and
 - iv) that had water shut off.

SECTION 2. This Ordinance shall be effective upon its passage by City Council and approval by the Mayor.

First Reading September 7, 2023
 Second Reading September 7, 2023
 Third Reading

Passed by City Council,

President of City Council

ATTEST: _____
City Clerk

Approved this ____ day of _____, 2024.

Mayor

SYNOPSIS: This Ordinance exempts eligible elderly and disabled residents as well as residences with children under the age of five from having water shut off for nonpayment of water service charges.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT: Although this legislation exempts eligible residents from water utility shutoffs for nonpayment, the effective deployment of LIHWAP funds should offset any negative fiscal impact to the City, therefore the legislation should be revenue neutral.