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Testimony of State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal Concerning Amendments to the New York City Water Board's Rate Schedule

My name is State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal and I represent the 47th Senate District, which encompasses the West Side of Manhattan from Christopher Street in Greenwich Village to West 103rd Street. Thank you, Chair Carney and members of the Board for the opportunity to testify.

Since the pandemic of 2020, our City's cost of living crisis has only grown more acute. In 2022, more than a third of adults and almost half of families with children in New York City [experienced food hardship](#). This crisis extends to water costs, with 1 in 4 customers behind on their bills, according to the [Department of Environmental Protection](#). After the expiration of the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program this year, households have few options in the face of climbing arrears. Given the severe and unprecedented need of so many New York families, I urge the Board to reject the proposed 8.5% rate increase.

It is especially concerning that this rate increase stems from the \$1.4 billion in rent charged by New York City to the Water Board. While the terms of the [lease agreement](#) between the City and the Water Board permit the City to request rent payments, New York's water-related liabilities are only [a fraction](#) of what they once were. In other words, the Board's rental payments serve only to plug general gaps in the City's budget—gaps that have little to do with our water infrastructure. In recognition of this, New York [ended](#) Water Board rental payments in 2017. By driving up water rates for all households irrespective of income, these payments are a deeply regressive tax.

Furthermore, rental payments hurt New York's efforts to address flood risks. With sea levels surrounding New York expected to rise at least [6 to 9 inches](#) in the 2030s and the cost of resiliency upgrades estimated at [\\$30 billion](#), our water infrastructure needs more investment than ever. Instead, the Water Board's rent payments divert resources that

could otherwise be put towards resiliency. Given the proximity of my district to the Hudson River, this policy endangers the life and property of my constituents.

In an effort to address these climate-induced risks, I co-sponsor [S8861](#), which passed the Senate on May 29, 2024. This bill would empower local water and sewer authorities to mitigate future impacts from extreme rain events. But we also need the Water Board and the City to do its part, without further burdening working households. I urge the Water Board to reject the proposed 8.5% rate increase and the City to drop its demand for rental payments.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you.