

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 28, 2025

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LIU, BRAUNSTEIN CALL ON DEP TO FIX \$22K WATER BILL FOR FLUSHING SENIOR CITIZEN

Flushing, NY - State Senator John Liu and Assembly Member Ed Braunsstein are demanding the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) take immediate action to cancel an erroneous \$22,818.71 water bill issued to an 86-year-old senior citizen and Flushing resident.

Margaret McGowan, a 50-year resident of Flushing, typically had a monthly bill of around \$85 per month since she bought the home in 2006. But in January 2024, she was blindsided by a notice from the city claiming she owed two years' worth of water bills totaling over \$20,000 plus interest, the equivalent of a staggering \$850 per month, or enough to fill up at least 10 swimming pools every month for two years. After two denied appeals, Mrs. McGowan now faces her final appeal with the Water Board, and was recently notified that DEP may even place a lien on her home.

State Senator John Liu stated, "Mrs. McGowan's ordeal is a textbook case study of government gone awry. Mistakes can happen, but instead of making corrections or even providing explanation and proof, DEP has dug its heels into an indefensible position. Outrageously, DEP has threatened to take this honest resident's house by imposing a property lien, presuming guilt unless Mrs. McGowan can prove her innocence, which is simply impossible for her, or anyone in this predicament, to do. DEP has to get their act together and stop harassing this homeowner, who has never had any issues with her bills before."

State Assembly Member Ed Braunstein stated, "After being issued an absurdly high water bill based on estimated readings, Mrs. McGowan has faced one bureaucratic headache after another. Now, the City's illogical billing has evolved into threat of a property lien. The DEP must do right by this senior homeowner and cancel these evidently erroneous charges."

In response to inquiries, DEP claimed, "Technicians have visited the property several times to confirm all equipment is working properly, which leads us to believe there has been a significant water leak in her home. Property owners are responsible for fixing water leaks and may be eligible for financial forgiveness if the leak is fixed properly."

Liu, Braunstein and Mrs. McGowan pushed back on DEP's statement, noting that not only has there been no evidence of a leak on the property, but the agency's assertion that "all equipment is working properly" is also misleading and incorrect.

Starting in January 2022, DEP began billing Mrs. McGowan based on estimated usage instead of actual readings due to a malfunction with DEP's metering equipment. For two years, DEP failed to take actual readings or repair the metering equipment, continuing to issue estimated bills to Ms. McGowan. After the meter was replaced, Mrs. McGowan's water bills returned to normal, casting doubt on DEP's assertions of a leak.

Margaret McGowan stated, "I've been a DEP customer for 50 years and nothing like this has ever happened before. I feel like I'm being punished for something that wasn't my fault, and I sincerely hope DEP will take responsibility and correct this mistake so I can move on with peace of mind."

Senator Liu said, "Hopefully, Mrs. McGowan's is an isolated case, and DEP does the right thing by rescinding these erroneous charges. I encourage any other resident experiencing difficulty with getting adequate answers from DEP to contact our offices at liu@nysenate.gov or braunsteine@nyassembly.gov."

A letter from Liu and Braunstein to DEP on behalf of Mrs. McGowan is attached.

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