



March 20, 2025

Rohit Aggarwala
Commissioner
New York City Department of Environmental Protection

Dear Commissioner Aggarwala,

We are writing to express our strong concern over the exorbitant water bill addressed to Ms. Margaret McGowan, an 86-year-old senior citizen, residing at 43-26 170 Street, Flushing, NY 11358. We urgently request that you take immediate action to remedy her erroneous charges.

Starting in January 2022, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) began billing Ms. 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. However, in January 2024, after replacing the water meter, DEP backbilled Ms. McGowan for over \$20,000, ten times her typical monthly water usage for that two-year span.

This \$20,000 bill is erroneous. Ms. McGowan, who has lived in her home for many years, reports no change in occupancy, no evidence of a leak, or any other circumstance that could cause DEP to claim such a spike in her water usage. Prior to her old meter's malfunction, her household averaged 0.27 CCF daily, and under the new meter, it has been averaging an even lower 0.12 CCF daily. These readings do not support the alleged usage of 2.75 CCF daily for which DEP has backbilled her.

Despite her appeals with DEP, Ms. McGowan was offered little information or recourse other than to engage in a final appeal with the Water Board. Our attempts to discuss the matter with DEP were met with similar responses. Currently, she is being charged more in interest from these erroneous charges than for water usage. DEP has even threatened to place a lien on her home, endangering her homeownership.

DEP has made an egregious mistake in claiming that she used extraordinarily huge amounts of water only during the period of time that DEP equipment malfunctioned and was not repaired on a timely basis by DEP. It is patently outrageous that DEP now threatens her with a lien. In fact, we find it inconceivable that DEP would subject this elderly customer to this prolonged distress when in fact all the evidence suggests that DEP was negligent and then mistaken.

We demand you intervene and cancel Ms. McGowan's erroneous charges. Out of decency, DEP should perhaps issue an apology as well.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact our offices at liu@nysenate.gov and braunsteine@nyassembly.gov. You may also reach us by phone at (718) 765-6675 or (718)

357-3588, respectively. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Edward C. Braunstein in black ink.

Edward C. Braunstein
26th Assembly District

Handwritten signature of John C. Liu in black ink.

John C. Liu
16th Senate District