

# Aqua Pennsylvania looking to acquire Chester Water Authority

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**DELAWARE COUNTY, Pa.** - There's a war over water in Delaware and Chester counties. Aqua Pennsylvania is looking to acquire the Chester Water Authority. Some customers are fighting back against this deal.

Santo Mazzeo, a Garnet Valley resident, is one of 49,000 customers of the Chester Water Authority spread over a few dozen municipalities across Chester and Delaware counties. He says that by Aqua's current rates, his bill would go from \$130 a quarter to \$130 a month.

"The privatization of water is not in the public's best interest," said Mazzeo. "We are teachers in the city, we're not living lavishly so every dollar that goes in and every dollar that goes out is watched carefully," he said.

Aqua Pennsylvania tells FOX 29 that if the sale goes through, the company agreed to keep the bills of Chester water customers the same for the next 10 years. Aqua's standard rates are admittedly higher, but the company says you get what you pay for.

"When you have a lesser rate that translates into less investment and you have to say to yourself where is the cut being made, is it truly reliable," said Marc Lucca, president of Aqua Pennsylvania.

Lucca provided an exclusive look at where some of that investment is spent. The utility's new water testing labs at the company's Bryn Mawr headquarters is where water quality is monitored in the parts per trillion and cybersecurity threats are assessed around the clock.

"This is not a part-time job. This is not something you can do while you are doing parks and police, parks and streets and fire," said Lucca.

Having the authority to sell Chester Water Authority is now being addressed in Pennsylvania courts.

"We give them quality water, we are award winning water in fact," said Cindy Leitzell, chair of the Chester Water Authority.

The deal could be worth nearly 300 million dollars but the authorities board says the decision to sell the 150-year-old utility should come from its customers. They also say it doesn't need any fixing.

"Many times with this privatization there are reasons for privatization. If an entity isn't doing well or infrastructure is bad, or it's not run well," said Leitzell. "But Chester Water Authority is run well, its infrastructure is in good shape."

The president of the National Association of Water Companies and Chester water ratepayer, Rob Powelson, says recent municipal water incidents like those in Flint, Michigan or the cyber attack on a water treatment plant in Florida show how water infrastructure has become a matter of national security.

"We are learning a lot of lessons from COVID how important the water grid is to our everyday lives," Powelson said. "You either invest or you become marginalized, and when you become marginalized, you start cutting corners around the grid."

A judge may decide the fate of the sale over the summer, but until then, the grassroots water issue will continue.

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