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State should focus on other ways to help Chester and leave CWA ratepayers alone

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I am a board member of the Chester Water Authority (CWA) concerned that Pennsylvania state government is trying to make CWA ratepayers eternally pay a higher rate for their water to solve a problem with City of Chester pensions that the state failed to resolve for the past 28 years.

The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) has been aggressively attempting to seize control of the CWA and monetizing its assets by improperly requesting the federal bankruptcy court to exercise its powers over separate, financial responsible government entities like the CWA, raising significant concerns about the negative economic impact on over 45,000 CWA ratepayers.

CWA ratepayers are angry and want the DCED to take their hands off their beloved public water utility. This exploitative DCED strategy involves funding very expensive resources, including the contract for stateappointed Receiver Michael Doweary, (his) Chief of Staff VJ Kapoor, and various consultants and law firms.

Public information reveals that the receiver's contracts total well over $10 million, with notable expenditures such as $913,720 for the chief of staff, plus $385,000 for each year the contract is extended, and nearly $3.4 million allocated to PFM Group Consulting LLC for financial advice.

CWA ratepayers argue that this illadvised use of funds could have been better applied toward directly addressing Chester's financial issues or promoting community development and

business growth in the city.

The DCED's focus on CWA as its primary solution appears fundamentally and fatally flawed; it overlooks the authority's independent governance status and risks providing only an unsustainable fix, at most, to deep-rooted financial problems in the City of Chester.

Moreover, any attempt to use CWA to bail out Chester will lead to massively higher water bills that will likely double or triple for over 200,000 residents across 37 municipalities, unfairly shifting the burden of the City of Chester's financial woes onto innocent ratepayers, the vast majority of whom reside outside of Chester.

Additionally, the aggressive pursuit of CWA raises questions about the DCED's accountability and transparency in Chester's financial decline. Instead of addressing its own shortcomings, the department seems intent on making CWA and its ratepayers bear the costs of years of its own mismanagement.

To move forward constructively, the DCED should focus on sustainable solutions that address the root causes of Chester's financial issues, explore alternative revenue sources that do not burden CWA ratepayers, and implement stricter oversight measures to prevent future crises. Ultimately, the DCED's fixation on CWA as a "magical silver bullet" is not only misguided, but potentially harmful to a well-run, independent water authority and its ratepayers, not to mention the precedent it threatens to set for healthy, well-run authorities across the Commonwealth.

An immediate reassessment of this approach by the DCED is essential for finding more effective solutions to Chester's financial challenges.