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Keeping public water focused on people it serves is paramount, not cashing out

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Communities place tremendous trust in the people and institutions responsible for managing public resources. That trust is not earned through rhetoric or appearances; it is earned through responsible stewardship and a consistent commitment to serving the public interest. Those principles should guide every public institution, especially when decisions affect assets that generations of residents have built, and that future generations of Pennsylvanians will rely upon.

Transparency is about far more than public meetings or procedural debates. It begins with timely independent audits, responsible financial management, and clear explanations of how public resources are being protected well into the future on behalf of the people who have paid and will pay for them.

For decades, Chester Water Authority (CWA) has lived by those principles.

We have remained a financially sound regional utility serving more than 200,000 people across Chester, Delaware, and Lancaster counties while continuing to invest in the infrastructure needed to provide safe, reliable, affordable drinking water.

In fact, CWA water is rated as the best tasting in the entire state, and we take that as seriously as we take our stewardship of this organization. Our financial statements are independently audited, our investments are made with long-term reliability in mind, and every decision is measured against our responsibility to the customers who depend on us for their health and livelihood every day.

That record is precisely why the recent Pennsylvania Supreme Court decision matters.

The court reaffirmed that CWA is an independent regional authority, rejecting Chester's claim that it could unilaterally seize control of CWA. Yet the legal dispute continues as the receiver for the city pursues additional legal avenues to gain control of the Authority, with the ultimate objective of monetizing a financially healthy public utility to address the city's unrelated fiscal challenges. That broader issue extends well beyond Chester. Financially healthy, public, not-forprofit utilities should remain focused on serving ratepayers, and not become financial assets used to solve government budget problems they did not create.

That is not simply a Pennsylvania issue. Across the country, financially stable notfor profit public utilities are increasingly viewed as financial assets to be monetized, privatized, and cashed out rather than essential public services. When that happens, the risk extends beyond one community. It raises important questions about whether ratepayer-funded infrastructure will remain dedicated to the purpose for which it was built; delivering reliable public services and protecting the longterm interests of the ratepayers that fund them.

Chester residents deserve to understand how years of state oversight have improved (or not improved) the city's fiscal outlook. They deserve clear and easily accessible accounting of public expenditure through fiduciary accountings and timely audited financial statements, as well as measurable progress. Extraordinary governmental authority should be matched by extraordinary public accountability.

These are not political questions. They are questions of stewardship. The same standards expected of local governments, authorities, nonprofits, and businesses should apply equally to every institution exercising public authority. Accountability cannot be selective. Public trust depends on consistent standards for everyone.

At Chester Water Authority, we will continue holding ourselves to those standards because they are fundamental to our mission. Protecting public trust means protecting the resources entrusted to us, investing responsibly for future generations, and remaining focused on delivering safe, reliable, affordable water to every customer we serve.

Ultimately, transparency is not measured by what is said. It is measured by what is done. Financial accountability. Responsible stewardship. Independent oversight. Results that people can see and trust. Those are the foundations of good governance, and they remain the standard the public should expect from every institution entrusted with serving it.