

118TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# H. RES. 1478

Recognizing access to water, sanitation, electricity, heating, cooling, broadband communications, and public transportation as basic human rights and public services that must be accessible, safe, justly sourced and sustainable, acceptable, sufficient, affordable, climate resilient, and reliable for every person.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 19, 2024

Ms. TLAIB (for herself, Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ, Ms. OMAR, Mr. CARSON, Ms. LEE of California, Ms. LEE of Pennsylvania, Mrs. RAMIREZ, Mr. HUFFMAN, Ms. PRESSLEY, Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN, Mr. JACKSON of Illinois, Ms. BUSH, and Mr. BOWMAN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and in addition to the Committees on Natural Resources, and Transportation and Infrastructure, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

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## RESOLUTION

Recognizing access to water, sanitation, electricity, heating, cooling, broadband communications, and public transportation as basic human rights and public services that must be accessible, safe, justly sourced and sustainable, acceptable, sufficient, affordable, climate resilient, and reliable for every person.

Whereas every person requires access to water, sanitation, electricity, heating, cooling, broadband communications,

and public transportation to survive and live a life with dignity;

Whereas decades-old infrastructure systems, including centralized utilities, disconnected wells, septic systems, uniped systems, the electric grid, and related power infrastructure, have reached their breaking points in safety and reliability in the midst of compounding crises of the climate emergency and fossil fuel-driven climate disasters, racial injustices, disinvestment in existing systems, and economic inequities that endanger the public's health and safety;

Whereas these crises are exacerbated by privatization of public goods and utilities by for-profit corporations that prioritize earnings and shareholders over the welfare of people, the planet, and public health, all while readily accepting public funding from Federal infrastructure programs;

Whereas millions of households collectively accrued more than \$20,000,000,000 of energy utility debt by 2023, utility bills are growing faster than household incomes, with water prices increasing 56 percent from 2012 to 2023 and becoming unaffordable for one in six households nationwide, and broadband prices typically rising faster than the rate of inflation, and utilities have become profoundly unaffordable for millions of people, causing over 34 percent of all households to cut back on basic needs to pay energy bills;

Whereas utilities are engaging in punitive residential customer payment collection practices including mass-scale service shutoffs, shutting off water service to an estimated 15,000,000 people in a typical year and electricity

service to households well over 5,700,000 times between 2020 and 2022;

Whereas many utilities send overdue water bills and associated late fees to tax authorities to impose liens, which can lead to tax sales of properties, contributing to property foreclosures that can evict people from their homes and lead to bankruptcy;

Whereas investor-owned utilities, fossil-fuel energy companies, and their industry associations fund and coordinate the obstruction of renewable energy policies and programs, including rooftop and community solar requirements and incentives;

Whereas utilities often rely on predatory collection agencies to pursue payment on unaffordable bills and debts that damage credit scores and cause long-term harm to households' ability to access affordable credit;

Whereas utility shutoffs and unaffordable bills have led to increasing numbers of vulnerable people dying from uncontrollable household temperatures and inaccessible water and sanitation after being denied access to utility services, thus posing substantial threats to general public and community health, as exemplified in a paper from Duke University researchers that found a nationwide utility shutoff moratorium could have prevented 15 percent of COVID-19 deaths in 2020, with similar findings in a published study from Cornell University;

Whereas disconnection from water, sanitation, electricity, heating, cooling, and broadband services increases housing and utility insecurity and exposure to eviction, homelessness, and resulting incarceration because of the criminalization of being unhoused;

Whereas disconnection from water, sanitation, electricity, heating, and cooling can expose families to State-enforced separation due to conditioning parental or guardian's ability to care for minor children or incapacitated adults on ensuring access to these essential services while, contradictorily, still allowing these services to be disconnected from people living in poverty;

Whereas the United States is the largest historical contributor to global greenhouse gas pollution, responsible for approximately 25 percent of cumulative carbon dioxide emissions since 1870, which is accelerating climate disasters and destabilizing ecosystems;

Whereas the climate emergency is causing widespread harm and acts as a multiplier of harmful exposures, and it has already begun to generate more intense storms, sea level rise and extreme weather events that place greater demand on and cause significant harm to the aging infrastructure, including overloading outdated stormwater and wastewater systems and threatening public health through flooding, sewage backups into homes, and sewage spills into public spaces, which disproportionately impact places where Black, Brown, and Indigenous people live, particularly among low-income communities and other groups who are economically vulnerable;

Whereas aging drinking water and wastewater systems need at least \$1,279,000,000,000 in improvements over the next 20 years to comply with existing Federal water quality regulations, according to the latest needs assessments from the Environmental Protection Agency;

Whereas 2023 was the hottest year on record and the need for cooling, air filtration, and public water fountains and refill stations will continue to increase as a result of the

climate emergency, accelerating the need to assist vulnerable people during heat waves, drought, extreme wildfire, and other heat- and air-quality-related emergencies;

Whereas environmental justice communities experience disparate and cumulative health impacts from climate change, air pollution, soil contamination, unsafe drinking water sources (including lead service lines and contaminated water supplies), and inadequate sanitation systems;

Whereas fossil-fuel energy primarily delivered by centralized utilities is driving the climate crisis and pollution;

Whereas the climate emergency poses a substantial threat to critical utility infrastructure and broadband communications networks vital to connectivity during times of emergency and rebuilding;

Whereas increased electricity rates and dirty electricity sources have disproportionately impacted communities of color;

Whereas the United States has joined a global pledge to transition away from fossil fuels and triple renewable energy and double energy efficiency by 2030; and

Whereas clean, renewable energy, distributed power, energy efficiency, and battery storage present nonpolluting, affordable, climate-resilient energy and opportunities for energy democracy: Now, therefore, be it

1        *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2            (1) recognizes access to water, sanitation, elec-

3            tricity, heating, cooling, broadband communications,

4            and public transportation as basic human rights and

5            public services that must be accessible, safe, justly

1 sourced and sustainable, acceptable, sufficient, af-  
2 fordable, climate resilient, and reliable for every per-  
3 son;

4 (2) affirms that access to utility services should  
5 be guaranteed for all people and should not be de-  
6 nied to any person based on ability to pay, housing  
7 status, immigration status, race, ethnicity, religion,  
8 age, gender, sexual orientation or identity,  
9 (dis)ability, employment status, credit history, or in-  
10 carceration status or history, and affirms that all  
11 agencies must enforce antidiscrimination language in  
12 existing laws and ensure language access through  
13 translation and interpretation to provide adequate  
14 communication with people in the language they  
15 speak at home;

16 (3) affirms that utilities should be held under  
17 public control, with equitable and transparent asset-  
18 management planning systems with policy-setting  
19 public involvement and intentional community en-  
20 gagement, based on the public interest and seeking  
21 to repair legacies of harm and pollution in environ-  
22 mental justice communities;

23 (4) calls for a full ban on water privatization  
24 and supports ending privatization contracts and  
25 franchises and municipalizing privatized systems;

1           (5) commits to the elimination of Federal fund-  
2           ing and subsidies for private water corporations;

3           (6) commits to the development and expansion  
4           of accountable Federal public power providers and  
5           Federal support for municipalities, cooperatives, and  
6           communities to produce, procure, and deliver clean,  
7           renewable energy, storage, and energy efficiency,  
8           and meaningful public accountability over any re-  
9           maining private utilities to deliver the same package  
10          of climate-resilient energy;

11          (7) calls for public municipalities, cooperatives,  
12          and smaller broadband providers to explore public  
13          ownership options and other means to provide bet-  
14          ter, more equitable, and affordable choices than in-  
15          cumbent for-profit companies alone provide;

16          (8) affirms that utility services must be afford-  
17          able for every person based on their ability to pay;

18          (9) calls for all public utility commissions to  
19          create processes to grant policy-setting powers to  
20          community-based organizations representing the  
21          most vulnerable populations within the utility service  
22          area, and to require racial and economic equity im-  
23          pact assessments to determine project prioritization;

1           (10) commits to a full ban on all punitive col-  
2           lection practices for unpaid household utility bills in-  
3           cluding—

4                   (A) disconnections of water, wastewater,  
5                   stormwater, electricity, heating, cooling, and  
6                   broadband service;

7                   (B) the use of property or tax foreclosures  
8                   or evictions;

9                   (C) the sale of any uncollected household  
10                  debt to collection agencies; and

11                  (D) the filing of an adverse report with a  
12                  credit-reporting agency;

13           (11) commits to provide and prioritize direct  
14           payments to environmental justice and impacted  
15           frontline communities for water, sanitation, distrib-  
16           uted solar, and broadband projects;

17           (12) commits to eliminate policies that crim-  
18           inalize a person’s inability to afford utility services,  
19           including unauthorized utility reconnections and a  
20           person’s inability to improve home septic systems  
21           and other utility infrastructure;

22           (13) commits to provide utility access to  
23           unhoused people for a basic level of service for the  
24           public good, including water for drinking, bathing,  
25           and sanitation, shelter from inclement weather, wild-



1 fire, floods, and extreme temperatures, access to  
2 public transportation, and access to internet commu-  
3 nication;

4 (14) affirms that utility services should be safe  
5 for all people, providing high-quality drinking water  
6 free from lead, arsenic, perfluoroalkyl and  
7 polyfluoroalkyl substances, and other contaminants,  
8 safe heating and cooling sources that do not rely on  
9 fuel oil, propane, or dangerous methane gas, and  
10 safe siting of lines and infrastructure that pro-  
11 tects workers and communities;

12 (15) affirms that policies facilitating the  
13 commodification and financialization of water re-  
14 sources, services, and systems such as private water  
15 bottling, interbasin diversions, and water futures  
16 trading should be banned;

17 (16) recognizes that, while short-term water ac-  
18 cess must be maintained in instances of public  
19 health risk, including through the distribution of  
20 prepackaged water, such a project is neither a long-  
21 term or sustainable solution to infrastructure-related  
22 public health crises;

23 (17) commits to direct Federal grants to sup-  
24 port capital improvements and operations, including  
25 the compensation packages necessary to attract and

1 retain a qualified unionized workforce, forgive out-  
2 standing municipal utility debt and household utility  
3 bill debt, and otherwise scale up the capacity of pub-  
4 licly-controlled utility services such as drinking  
5 water, wastewater, and stormwater systems;

6 (18) commits to requiring climate adaptation  
7 planning to reduce risk and cost burden on tax-  
8 payers and climate-resilient utility solutions, includ-  
9 ing—

10 (A) enhanced clean, renewable energy and  
11 energy efficiency technologies (including rooftop  
12 and community solar, storage, microgrids,  
13 weatherization technologies, heat pumps, and  
14 other efficient cooling and heating tech-  
15 nologies); and

16 (B) updated indoor air-quality standards  
17 and expanded water conservation measures (in-  
18 cluding green infrastructure and stormwater  
19 management);

20 (19) affirms that investments in new and exist-  
21 ing infrastructure should prioritize local, responsibly  
22 sourced, and clean, renewable energy while divesting  
23 from all global extractive and fossil-fuel processes  
24 that harm local communities, economies, and cul-  
25 tures in the United States, in the Global South, and

1 across Tribal communities, which disproportionately  
2 bear the climate burdens and consequences of ex-  
3 tractive capitalism of Western nations;

4 (20) commits to provide direct grant invest-  
5 ments in environmental justice and frontline commu-  
6 nities that have been historically burdened to in-  
7 crease the availability, affordability, safety, reli-  
8 ability, and accessibility of electricity, broadband,  
9 water, wastewater, stormwater, sanitation, heating,  
10 and cooling needs, while supporting high-quality,  
11 family-sustaining union jobs and requiring commu-  
12 nity benefit agreements and local hiring and job  
13 training for residents in affected communities,  
14 project labor agreements, labor peace agreements,  
15 and living wages;

16 (21) commits to upholding Tribal treaties for  
17 self-governance and self-determination;

18 (22) commits to creating a Federal database  
19 that requires utilities to standardize regularly issued  
20 reports for water quality, noncompliance events, dis-  
21 ruptions, disconnections, and includes data on length  
22 of disconnections, amount of arrearages, demo-  
23 graphics, and income levels of affected communities;  
24 and

1           (23) commits to establishing an interagency  
2           task force composed of relevant experts to develop  
3           and submit to Congress, and publish publicly, a  
4           plan, including timelines, for implementation of the  
5           activities committed to under paragraphs (5), (6),  
6           (10), (11), (12), (13), (17), (18), (20), (21), and  
7           (22).

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