



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEW PILOT WATER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM TO HELP JACKSON RESIDENTS WHO HAVE FALLEN BEHIND

Pilot Program Launches Week of July 19 to Help Customers Ahead of Anticipated September 1st Resumption of Water Cut Offs Previously Suspended During the Height of the Pandemic

(JACKSON, Miss.) – Yesterday, Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba, together with Sally Doty, Executive Director, Mississippi Public Utilities Staff, announced a new pilot program available to help Jackson residents who have fallen behind on water and sewer payments to take advantage of state assistance. The City of Jackson and the Mississippi Public Utilities Staff are dedicated to increasing residents’ awareness of this and various other programs available to support those who have fallen behind on their bills and may be newly eligible for financial assistance.

“We understand that many Jacksonians are facing past-due water and sewer bills for a variety of circumstances and we want them to know that help is available,” said Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba. “COVID-19 in particular hit hard. Many residents suddenly found themselves struggling to make ends meet. We are grateful for this partnership with the state and in particular Sally Doty and her team at the Mississippi Public Utilities Staff for this pilot program. Our goal is to give every customer, no matter how much they owe, an opportunity to quickly bring their balance more current so that they can begin a fresh start.”

During the 2021 Mississippi State Legislative Session, the City of Jackson requested and was granted the authority for cities with a population of 150K or more to adjust, release, or extinguish indebtedness from customers’ water and sewer bills under certain circumstances with HB 359. Over the past few months, the city has worked closely with the state to define the parameters, eligibility and process for this assistance.

“I want to first thank Mayor Lumumba and everyone from the City of Jackson government who helped make this plan a reality,” said Sally Doty, Executive Director, Mississippi Public Utilities Staff. “Having frank conversations can often make people uncomfortable, but through this entire process the mayor and his team have been open to hard conversations and plans to move forward. Carla Dazet along with her team at the Water Sewer Business Administration office worked day and night to help us reach the point where we have an equitable solution that is reality based.”

Beginning the week of July 19th, two payment plans will be implemented and WSBA will be announcing expanded hours to accommodate more customers.

1. **Low-Income Assistance Plan (LIAP)** – Available for any water/sewage arrearage for 24 months
 - Must show proof of participation in the MS Home Corp Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) program
 - Must pay current bill for three months
 - Must apply for any federal or state utility aid programs
 - Must pay current bill plus \$10 for 24 months
2. **Courtesy Payment Arrangement Plan (CoPAP)** for those customers who do not qualify as low-income.

- Available for customers with a 1-inch meters or less
 - Must pay the current bill for three months
 - Must apply for federal and state utility aid programs
 - Must pay 40% over 24 months
3. Additionally, there will be a **Special Circumstances Panel** for those experiencing extreme financial hardship. Special circumstances may include, but are not limited to:
- Instances of error
 - Equipment failure
 - Debt deemed uncollectable
 - Unforeseen damage due to weather
4. And, a **Stranded Bills-Flat Rate** is being established for those who know they have a balance, but have not recently received a bill. WSBA can put customers on a flat rate so that payments may begin in order to enter the program.

Mayor Lumumba added, “We made sure during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic that nobody’s water was turned off. But, as we begin to emerge, it is necessary that we consider the health of our water system and begin to resume water cut-offs starting September 1st. We are asking that residents please take every effort to take advantage of these programs so that they are not impacted.”

City of Jackson Water/Sewer customers can contact WSBA at 601-960-2000 or via email at wsba@jacksonms.gov. Also visit www.jacksonms.gov/water-sewer-business-administration for the most recent updates from WSBA.

Mississippi Home Corporation RAMP-ERA Event – July 23-24

Separately, but very much related, the City of Jackson also announced its partnership with Mississippi Home Corporation to help Jackson renters who may have fallen behind on rent and utilities payments over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic. In a two-day RAMP-ERA Event at the Trade Mart Center at the Mississippi Fairgrounds on Friday, July 23 from noon to 3pm and Saturday, July 24 from 10am to 2pm, representatives will help renters apply for federal assistance to pay for rent, gas, electricity and water/sewer.

More detailed information about this event will be shared in the week ahead. Renters are encouraged to check the City’s website later this week at www.JacksonMS.gov. It is important that those applying for the City’s Pilot Water Bill Assistance Program also apply for this opportunity in order to take advantage of the maximum possible relief available.

For more information about the RAMP-ERA Program visit www.ms-ramp.com/era or call 601-533-8401 or Toll-Free 1-888-725-0063.

Also, the Jackson Leadership Foundation is leading volunteer efforts for this event, please contact 601-421-4445 or go to their website at jacksonleadershipfoundation.org for more information.

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