



February 14, 2023

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE, Room 453
Salem, OR 97301

RE: City of Beaverton Supports HB 3125 (Drinking Water & Sewer Ratepayer Assistance Fund)

Dear Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Hartman and Owens, and Members of the Committee:

The City of Beaverton appreciates the opportunity to share its support for HB 3125, which provides critical utility assistance to some of our most vulnerable residents. The bill establishes the Public Drinking Water and Sewer Ratepayer Assistance Fund and appropriates \$15 million in state money to assist low-income Oregonians with water and sewer bill payments.

The City of Beaverton provides water service to approximately 90% of its residents. Drinking water and sewer rate affordability has been a long-standing challenge for many households, a challenge made only more acute by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the months prior to the pandemic, citywide water bill delinquencies averaged a total of \$160,000; as of June 2022, total delinquencies jumped to \$650,000, a greater than 400 percent increase.

Recent local and federal investments have been successful in reducing delinquencies for Beaverton water customers. Since Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, the City of Beaverton has dedicated \$82,000 of its federal CARES Act allocation and \$120,000 in city revenue to customer assistance programs. In 2021, the State of Oregon received \$14 million in one-time federal funds for water and sewer rate assistance, which to-date has provided 194 Beaverton residents with \$110,000 in assistance via the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWA).

Although these investments have reduced delinquencies for Beaverton residents, significant needs still remain: as of January 2023, the City had 507 residential customers with delinquent balances over 60 days, totaling more than \$225,000 in unpaid bills. Unfortunately, federal funding for the LIHWA program is scheduled to run out this calendar year, which puts the program at risk of ending absent state action to replenish the fund. We encourage the Legislature to act this session to provide continued relief to low-income households that experience a disproportionately high utility and water burden.

Thank you for the opportunity to lend our support to HB 3125. Please feel welcome to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Weinheimer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dan Weinheimer, Assistant City Manager