



May 29, 2019

Let's Make Sure Our Water Rates are Fair

To address the great variation of rates charged for the use of water, I became the Chief House Sponsor of SB1724, the Water Rate Bill. SB1724 requires a review of water rates in Illinois to ensure they are affordable and fair. The legislation was introduced in the Senate by Sen. Napoleon Harris III, D-Harvey. The passing of SB1724 will create a Water Rate Advisory Committee to examine how much communities pay for water, in addition to determining how water rates are set.

SB1724 was passed through a bipartisan effort. With this legislation, we finally will be able to fairly monitor the rates of water for citizens of Illinois. It is only right that the system is transparent and allows everyone to know for which services they will be charged.

Under the measure, no later than December 1, 2020, the Government Finance Research Center at the University of Illinois at Chicago, in coordination with an intergovernmental advisory committee, must issue a report evaluating the setting of water rates throughout the Lake Michigan service area of northeastern Illinois and, no later than December 1, 2021, for the remainder of Illinois. The bipartisan effort came to light after a report in the Chicago Tribune's Water Drain series. As reported in the Tribune, there is substantial variation in water rates charged to users of Lake Michigan water. The investigation also found that residents of towns with a majority of African American residents pay monthly water bills that are 20% higher than towns with a majority of white residents. Some of the towns with the highest rates also lose over one-third of their water to leaking infrastructure.

I believe that with SB1724 being passed, the Water Rate Advisory Committee will help Illinois residents gain confidence that their state will operate fairly. Access to water is basic to human life, and I am glad we can keep it affordable and fair in Illinois.

The committee would comprise of academic experts and representatives from numerous state agencies, which include the state Environmental Protection Agency, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Attorney General's office and the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. After passing the House and the Senate, the legislation currently awaits concurrence and then the governor's signature. Let's keep our water rates fair!

Sincerely,

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District