Media Release

Portland Water Bureau

For Immediate Release

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For more information, contact Public Information at 503-823-8064.

## Federally Funded Program Provides $2.6 million in Relief for Local Sewer/Stormwater/Water Utility Bills

Two years into the pandemic, approximately 12,000 Portland households that receive a sewer/stormwater/water bill have fallen behind on their payments. The city’s utility bureaus have made many caring and compassionate changes to meet our community’s needs during the pandemic. One example is using funding from a federal grant to create the Afloat: Utility Debt Relief program, which helped more than 2,000 households in our community get payments back on track. **All eligible applications—2,004 accounts—received funding.** The average credit was $1,336, depending on need.

**About Afloat debt relief**

The Portland Water Bureau and the Bureau of Environmental Services used funding from the American Rescue Plan Act to give bill credits to qualifying households with debt related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The program was developed with the African American Alliance for Homeownership, the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA), and Verde.

“Water is life. Afloat brought not just drinking water to those who can’t afford it, it brought life to those who deserve to live,” said Josh Groesz, Housing and Stabilization Services Director at NAYA.

“Portland was experiencing an affordability crisis before the pandemic brought additional financial, mental, and emotional stress,” said Portland Water Bureau Director Gabriel Solmer. “This program is another way the utility bureaus can make a difference to households struggling to recover.”

"In a time of crisis, it’s important that we act decisively to deliver relief to Portlanders who are struggling to pay their bills,” said Commissioner Mingus Mapps. “I’m proud of the Water Bureau for leading this work, in collaboration with some of our essential community partners to provide relief to our community."

The $2.6 million in funding for the Afloat: Utility Debt Relief program comes from the federal American Rescue Plan Act. The City of Portland applied for this funding to meet many needs across the city; relieving utility bill debt is just one part of a broader program.

* Of the 2,601 applications, 79 were submitted using our translated applications in Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, and Chinese. Eligibility guidelines [found here](https://www.portland.gov/water/afloatfaqs).
* 47 percent of applicants identified as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) (42 percent White and 11 percent I prefer not to say).
* 57 percent of applicants identified as women.
* 19 percent of applicants identified as living with a disability.

We continue to look for ways to support our customers’ recovery from the pandemic. Please call our customer service team to learn about options for getting your bill back on track. We offer long-term, interest-free payment arrangements for any customer who’s having trouble paying their bill, plus a [bill discount and crisis voucher](https://www.portland.gov/water/water-financial-assistance) for people who qualify. Call 503-823-7770 for options or visit [portland.gov/water/water-financial-assistance](https://www.portland.gov/water/water-financial-assistance/financial-assistance).

### About the Portland Water Bureau

The Portland Water Bureau serves water to almost a million people in the Portland area. Portland’s water system includes two great water sources, 53 tanks and reservoirs, and 2,200 miles of pipes. With 600 employees working on everything from water treatment to customer service, the Water Bureau is committed to serving excellent water every minute of every day.

This project is funded by the American Rescue Plan, a federal economic stimulus bill designed to help communities recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recession. The City of Portland is receiving $208 million of local recovery funds. Investments focus on three key priorities: houselessness response and household stabilization, business and commercial district stabilization, and community health and safety. For more information, go to portland.gov/united/american-rescue-plan.