

*Consumer Protection Groups oppose Aqua NC rate hike*  
**High rates will hurt low-income customers**

RALEIGH, NC—On Friday, Aqua North Carolina filed its third rate increase request in five years with the North Carolina Utilities Commission. Consumer organizations say the rate hikes, if approved, will burden customers and create financial hardships without any guarantee their water or sewer service will improve.

Aqua NC has a quarter of a million customers in 53 North Carolina counties, and customers already pay some of the highest water and sewer bills in the state – about 68% higher than the weighted average for monthly water bills, and 89% higher than the average for sewer bills, according to data from the UNC Environmental Finance Center. Customers have come out in numbers to protest rate increases at NC Utilities Commission hearings, many complaining of poor water quality, low pressure, slow response times and customers service issues.

Now, the company wants to raise its customers' average monthly water bill from \$42 to \$52, and the flat fee sewer customers pay from \$65 to \$75 monthly, resulting in a 19% increase to gross revenues for the company.

Aqua America, the company's parent corporation, has paid a consecutive quarterly dividend to shareholders for 65 years, and had their strongest financial year ever in 2012. Their NC customers now fear their bills will go up – again – with a cut of that money going to line the pockets of national executives while their tap water continues to flow brown.

“Low-income and small households will be hit hardest by this increase,” says Katie Hicks, Assistant Director of Clean Water for North Carolina, an environmental justice organization promoting safe, affordable drinking water. “We’ve heard from quite a few who are already struggling to keep up with the company’s current rates. We urge the Utilities Commission to reject this request and fulfill their mission to keep private utilities’ rates in check!”

“The NC Utilities Commission should reconsider the generous padding they allow in Aqua NC’s rates,” says customer Stan Coleman. “All the incentives seem to go Aqua’s way, and they’re never penalized when they don’t deliver their end of the deal – clean drinking water and good service. I live inside the City of Charlotte and pay a 600% markup just to receive my own municipal water and sewer services. That’s not ratemaking in the best interest of the public!”

This year, the company is requesting approval of a new surcharge legalized by the 2013 General Assembly. If the Utilities Commission improves this Water and Wastewater System Improvement Charge (WSIC), Aqua NC will be able to increase customer rates by 5% automatically in between Utilities Commission proceedings, with no opportunity for public comment. This surcharge, which the company argues will help fund improvements for customers whose water contains iron and manganese, can legally be used for a host of projects, including extension of new water and wastewater lines to new developments.

The NC Utilities Commission will hold public hearings for customers sometime this fall.

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**About Clean Water for North Carolina:**

**Clean Water for NC** works to promote clean, safe water and environments and empowered, just communities for all North Carolinians through community organizing, education, advocacy and technical assistance, with offices in Asheville and Durham, NC.

**About Food & Water Watch:**

**Food & Water Watch** works to ensure the food, water and fish we consume is safe, accessible and sustainably produced, with offices in Washington, DC; Durham, NC; and throughout the country.

**About F.L.O.W. (Friends of Locally Owned Water) North Carolina:**

**F.L.O.W. North Carolina** is a grassroots organization of private water customers.